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EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Thesis

**HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?
AN INTERRELIGIOUS ECO- JUSTICE MODEL FOR THE LOCAL
COMMUNITY**

BY

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Following the strong recommendation of my advisor, Rick McCall, in the fall of 2007 I enrolled in a course led by Lama John Makransky at Boston College. The course focused on meditation theory and practice in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Tibetan understanding of awareness and its capacities for calm attention, inclusive love, compassion and transcendental wisdom were explored through some of the professor's own recent writing and through Buddhist texts in translation, chiefly *The Path of Heroes* and *Great Path of Awakening*, commentaries by two leading nineteenth century Tibetan scholars on the twelfth century Tibetan text, "The Seven Points of Mind Training." This system of "mind training" focuses on ways of re-emerging all aspects of life as means to awaken wisdom and compassion, ultimate and relative *bodhichitta*, especially difficulties and sufferings of life. Study of the texts was supported by weekly instruction and the daily practice of meditation. The meditations were designed to shed light on

the weekly readings and to be accessible to persons from any religious traditions “The expressed purpose of the meditations was to help students deepen their understanding of Buddhist concepts and to see what light they may shed on the spirituality of students' own traditions and lives.”¹ Charlene Spretnak describes the best way to deepen one's understanding of Buddhist concepts is to practice meditation:

This is why even the very first steps on the path of dhamma are achieved only in meditation. All the teachings, all the *suttas*, all the discursive embellishments exist only to support the *practice* of meditation. Neither can the therapeutic nor the cosmological realizations of Dhamma can be experienced merely through the mode of intellectual descriptions. This is why the Buddha discouraged people from accepting his words until they had tried the process.²

Through meditation, more often than not, I experience peace that my spiritual benefactors give me that I cannot gain from any person or outside activity or thought. In meditation these persistently and intentionally recalled spiritual benefactors remind me both by their presence, and then, when I'm ready, in my merging with them into oneness, that they are truly right there smiling, wishing me “deepest well being, happiness and joy.” They are my mentors for learning to extend that wish before any other thoughts I have of those I love, don't love, or simply don't think much about. And these mentors remind me, that “Adverse conditions are our spiritual friend.”³

I give thanks for my training with Lama John Markansky which has greatly affected my own spiritual practice and increased my awareness of harm caused to the earth and all its inhabitants. I am deeply grateful to Don Swearer of Harvard Divinity School for the abundant Buddhist readings and deep conversation⁴ which underscored the critical teaching of *pattica samupadda* and raised for me the first time, the questions that have been a critical voice in this thesis: What can I learn from the path of the *boddhisattva*? Can I be a *boddhisattva*? How has my practice in Tibetan Buddhism informed my life as a Christian environmentalist?

So, to all teachers, especially Lama John Makransky and Don Swearer, and to all my spiritual ancestors, I give thanks.

When I realize that true love is not possessive, but genuine in desiring what is best for the other, I am freed from being caught up in what others think of me. Meditating on this deepest wish frees me from offering my personal opinion about “what is best” for someone else to what is “really best” – deepest happiness, wellbeing and joy. I give thanks for all those who have inspired me and taught me so much about this practice of “letting go and letting God” run my life. This shift in my spiritual practice has had a profound effect on the way I care of all of God's creation, particularly for the waters, animals, plant life and air that have been so marred by human greed and self centeredness.

¹From the syllabus of the course, “Buddhist Meditation Theory: Tibet,” Fall 2007.

²Charlene Spretnak, *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 53.

³Zheche Gyaltsab and Padma Gyurmed Mangya, *Path of Heroes: Birth of Enlightenment: Volume 11*, Translated by Deborah Black (Oakland, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1995), 417.

⁴“Buddhism and Ecology,” Harvard Divinity School, Spring 2007.

I give thanks for the gift of life itself.

In the words of poet Mary Oliver, may I too proclaim, “My work is loving the world.... Let me keep my mind on what matters, which is my work...”⁵

⁵ Mary Oliver, *Thirst* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 1.

INTRODUCTION

“The world is a fragile place. It has always been so. What has changed is that within the hearts of its most powerful citizens, a space has been made from which we may discover our own roles in preserving this world, as well as those of the peoples for whom fragility has always been a way of life.”¹ The aim of this thesis is to examine the global environmental crisis that has escalated in the last decade and to explore what people of faith, specifically people adopting Buddhist and Christian ecofeminist views of the environment, can bring to this moral dilemma. What are interreligious and interdisciplinary models for living with critical attention to the fragility of the earth and the resources we have squandered from it? Using interreligious and interdisciplinary models, I will explore how to develop and deepen spiritual community at the congregational and town level through mutually beneficial environmental and economic justice initiatives. I will articulate an emerging environmental worldview from both Christian and Buddhist perspectives that supports respect for nature, its conservation, and the development of an environmental ethic.

In his 1967 seminal article, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,”² medieval scholar Lynn White criticizes Western Christianity for promoting human dominance over nature and, hence, contributing to the environmental crisis. White commends Buddhism for its holistic, egalitarian worldview, but doubts that its teaching of the harmonious relationship between human beings and all creation is viable in

¹Iza Hussin, *Islam and the Challenge of Interfaith Activism*, EDS Occasional Papers, No. 8, February 2002.

²Lynn White, Jr. “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis, *Science* 155 (1967), 5
<http://64.233.169.104/search?q=cache:a4PsLbFwSrEJ:aeoe.org/resources/spiritual/rootsofcrisis.pdf+'lynn+white'+historical+roots+of+our+ecological+crisis&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=us> (accessed February 15, 2008).

Western society. I disagree. Spurred on by White and inspired by Ivone Gebara and other ecofeminists, I believe that we can change our way of both thinking and knowing. The teaching and practices (dharma and deed) from Western Engaged Buddhism aid Christians in critically re-examining Christian teaching about ecology and applying these teachings to the environmental crisis. In particular, the local community that is addressed in this application is my own: Bennington, Vermont.

The “Great Turning” is a name coined by Buddhist Joanna Macy for the shift away from the Western economic system dependent on accelerating growth. This Western political economy has set its goals and measured its performance in terms of increasing corporate profits. A Western capitalist model plays into a patriarchal epistemology that is destructive, for it views nature as having only instrumental value given by human domination. To the contrary, nature has incredible inherent worth. Some of that intrinsic value can be celebrated and enjoyed in the development of an ecofeminist epistemology. Such a way of knowing based on mutuality is just what is needed in ascribing an intrinsic rather than an instrumental value to nature while acknowledging that an environmental ethic “depends on understanding that we as human beings are inextricably linked to nature.”³

In the first chapter, I will look at how a patriarchal epistemology as defined by Ivone Gebara in *Longing for Running Water*⁴ emphasizes a rational way of learning promulgated in Western Christian teaching. I will examine the themes of alienation from nature, as described in the myths of the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis.

³Don Swearer, “Principles and Poetry, Places and Stories: The Resources of Buddhist Ecology,” *Daedalus* Fall 2001, 9.

⁴Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

Fundamental to this critique of a Western Christian rational view of human domination over nature is “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.” In the second chapter I will turn to the work of ecofeminist theologians, some of them from the Third World, for an epistemology of suffering narrative. In the third chapter, I will explore the central role of suffering in Buddhist teaching and how suffering is critical to the spiritual practice of Buddhists today. Further, I will show how Buddhism is very useful in showing us a way out of our destructive consuming paths. In the final chapter I will cite examples of exciting developments in Bennington, Vermont that are based on the practice of dharma and deed, teaching and action. These models are creating flourishing eco-justice models. They are sustainable,⁵ spiritual and economically just for those most affected by economic and environmental degradation.

As the economic downturn of late 2008 revealed, a corporate profit model, particularly one that has gone largely unchecked and unregulated, is neither sustainable nor moral. This corporate model encouraged waste and degradation of the limited resources of the earth and further destabilization of developing countries and struggling local communities, including my town of Bennington, Vermont. The great unraveling of the Western economic growth system has begun to occur. We can be part of a new model, or we can continue to contribute to further destruction of life systems. “The choice is before us: to care for the Earth or to participate in the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life.”⁶

⁵Sustainability is often referred to as “the ability to provide for the needs of the world’s current population without damaging the ability of future generations to provide for themselves.”

⁶“The Earth Charter: Benchmark Draft” as in *Buddhist Perspectives on the Earth Charter* (Cambridge, MA: Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, 1997), 13 and see more specifically, www.earthcharter.org.

There is urgency in these pages for we are losing time as the earth heats up; ready resolve is critical in educating and planning for a future where we might see life forms flourishing. In the ten years since the first publication of *the Earth Charter*, an international declaration of fundamental values promulgating a just, sustainable, and peaceful global community, the world has witnessed a dramatic and unprecedented change to its climate. Global warming is universal and upon us, more costly to all life forms than previously documented or imagined and most detrimental to those living at and below poverty levels. This crisis demands humanity's greatest endeavors as we ask the long-term question of humanity: What do you want your climate to look like over the next decades and century and what are you willing to do about it? The focus has been "global" warming, but local place is critical in our ecojustice work, the place where our work begins. The Buddhist teaching of interconnectedness underscores how what we do at the local level has a ripple effect throughout the world. My local community, therefore, will play a critical role in developing an environmental ethic.

When people experience how their lives and local communities are changing before their eyes they are often moved to think and act differently from "the way we have always done it." What we do and say at the local community level can have profound effect at a national level, from the laws we advocate and enact to the prayers we offer. Some actions are more easily measured than others, i.e., the measuring of national carbon emissions by certain dates and by certain percentages, are being translated at the personal level into programs designed to decrease one's ecological footprint.⁷ If global warming were the only factor being measured for Americans following the principles of the Earth

⁷A carbon footprint is the total set of GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions caused directly and indirectly by an individual, community or organization. There are many online tools to measure one's carbon footprint, i.e., www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator or www.carbonCounter.org.

Charter, then we as students of the Charter would be receiving failing grades for the ecocide occurring on our watch. Ecocide, the destruction of our ecosystem by human activity, including warfare, raises the deepest ethical concerns about living in the world.

CHAPTER ONE

“All Epistemologies Will Lead Us to Ethical Issues”⁸

The environmental crisis will not be solved by science; it will be solved by a change in heart, the heart manifested in practice, as pilgrims of all faiths together walk new paths in developing models and methods for addressing the most pressing problem facing the earth today. My upbringing has not provided me with the resources or worldview that I need to move forward in the critical work of eco-justice, critical for my own eco-conscience, critical for the future and viability of the Episcopal Church and vital for all life flourishing in the twenty-first century. As a Christian and professional Episcopalian committed to responding with heart and practice to the environmental crisis, I have begun to realize that I need resources outside and beyond the Western church's largely patriarchal epistemology.⁹ I need to explore an ecofeminist¹⁰ epistemology in looking for a methodology to mitigate further environmental degradation. I also need the resources of Western Engaged Buddhism¹¹ in developing my spiritual practice of eco-justice. Christianity is my platform; in crossing a bridge to Engaged Western Buddhism and ecofeminism I take this Christian standpoint with me. But it is time cross over to a wider view that is more inclusive in epistemology and application than my native Western Christianity has been. An ecofeminist epistemology holds up the integrity and

⁸Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 23. I am indebted to Gebara for not only the impetus behind this thesis, but also for helping me to shape this thesis. I am deeply grateful to Professor Kwok Pui Lan for strongly recommending that I read *Longing for Running Water* before writing this thesis.

⁹*Ibid.*, 30-48. Gebara includes essentialism, monotheism, eternal truths and Aristotelianism and Thomistic theology as features of a patriarchal epistemology.

¹⁰Gebara describes a “somewhat different” epistemology for ecofeminism which includes “independence in knowing,” “knowing as process,” the “necessary bond between spirit and matter, mind and body” and gender-based epistemology among others, 52. See also 30-48.

¹¹Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 91. Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh entitles a chapter “Mindfulness Must be Engaged,” in which he notes that a response to the “real problems” of the world requires people be guided by mindfulness when going out into the world to help others.

authority of the local community, setting appropriate curbs on rampant individualism. Such focus on preserving community is found in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, in spite of their patriarchal and androcentric texts. The appeal of a non-dualistic, non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal model in Engaged Buddhism, in harmony with all things, while not contrary to the teachings of Jesus, does challenge the history and traditions of the institutionalized church. “There is no phenomenon in the universe that does not intimately concern us.”¹²

When I first traveled outside the United States as a college freshman, I traveled very far – not only in miles, but also in my cultural imagination. As a college singer with the Brown University Chorus in 1976, I toured India. That was probably the first time in my life that I had even thought about what it would have been like had I not been raised as a Christian in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. And then, I began to think about whether I would be a Christian had I been born in India – probably not. Since 1976 I have continued to think about what has shaped who I am and how I know what I know. I am beginning to realize just how critical a role epistemology plays in shaping one’s understanding of the world and one’s response to the environmental crisis. So, in many ways, exploration of the environmental crisis and a religious response to it begins with epistemology and how we consciously increase our awareness of the suffering of the planet.

Adopting an inclusive ecofeminist epistemology with teachings from Engaged Buddhism and emphasizing the deepening of one’s spiritual practice are the methodologies I will employ in examining the Western world’s roots in the ecological

¹²Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Sun My Heart,” in *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, ed. Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, 1st ed. (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2000), 84.

crisis and our personal and collective responses as religious people and representatives of religious institutions. As Lynn White observes, “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion.”¹³ Paul O. Ingram asks the critical question, “Why is it important for Western organic environmental paradigms to encounter Asian versions of organic views of nature...? The answer is: because what people do to the natural environment corresponds to what they think and experience about themselves in relation to the things around them.”¹⁴ The way in which people of faith, particularly young adults, mix religious traditions and beliefs is an example of how boundaries between different belief systems have become much more porous the last few decades and how epistemology has grown complex in developing an environmental worldview.¹⁵

Just as scholars are reinterpreting ancient Buddhist texts in light of their application to contemporary Buddhism, so too Christians are reconsidering passages in the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament in light of their own epistemologies. I believe such sharing of religious traditions and reconsideration of sacred texts are ways in which people try to bridge the gaps between theory and practice in a globalized world. The result is that people have become less loyal to a particular religious affiliation. Increasingly people are drawn to a particular religion because of its programs or

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Paul O. Ingram, “The Jeweled Net of Nature, *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997, 83.

¹⁵Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim in the “Series Forward” in *Buddhism and Ecology*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, xvi. Worldview follows the definition, “Religions provide basic interpretive stories of who we are, what nature is, where we have come from, and where we are going. This comprises a worldview of a society.”

concerns, e.g., ecology. People are less likely to seek out a faith tradition because of its essential teachings. Crossing over from one religious tradition to another in the call to care for the earth and all its inhabitants is not unusual any more. This cross over of religious traditions is exciting, inspirational and -essential in a world often immobilized by the enormity of the environmental crisis.

Buddhist teachings about the interdependence of all in nature and meditation on suffering move us away from a colonial, patriarchal, imperialist view of human domination over nature to a view that understands humans as part of nature. Experiencing nature first hand gives us compassion and builds desire to mitigate the suffering of all life forms, for nature has intrinsic value. It is also critical to observe how a patriarchal epistemology has often suppressed an emphasis on nature's intrinsic value in order to elevate humanity's role in nature and a desire to rule over nature rather than be a harmonious part of it.

Epistemologies Shape Our Worldview

How do we know what we know? As human beings there are so many ways that we learn and bring meaning to our lives. As infants we learn from what we can hear, see, taste, touch and smell, with our minds processing that empirical knowledge faster than we can probably comprehend. Psychologists and anthropologists tell us that our earliest meaning-making comes largely from our parents and our environment. It makes sense that that our religious consciousness is shaped largely by our parents and our immediate world. In many middle class white households of the 1960's, such as my own, a loving white father provided for his children's wellbeing through full-time employment, cared for material needs, punished when it was deemed necessary and controlled the child's

environment for a time until offspring were deemed responsible to be on their own.

Daddy loved his children unconditionally but not without rules. He always knew what is best for his children. Indeed, this was my picture of God until my college years. And, not all aspects of this picture have been detrimental to me. A loving God that cares for me unconditionally is a good place to begin, but it is only the beginning to unpacking an inherited patriarchal epistemology. Western Christianity is my perspective, my world view and part of my bias in the lens with which I view the world.

Critical to coming to grips with the suffering I have brought to the earth and to its inhabitants is an understanding of how I know the creator God and an understanding of my role in the natural world. Acknowledging the suffering brought about by personal and corporate religious imperialism is the very first step in healing relationships that have been created by oppression and domination. Acknowledgment of individual and religious culpability in the global ecological crisis is also the first way to move towards decreasing the suffering of the earth and its inhabitants. For example, people living at the economic edges of society suffer from increased health risks, such as asthma, a direct result of the increase of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. "When people think about climate impacts, they think about something very narrow: What icky things are going to happen where I live?"¹⁶ writes Jerry Mahlman, a senior research associate at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado. "They don't say: 'What's going to happen to the poor Bangladeshi farmers who get hit with a triple whammy rising sea levels, more intense tropical cyclones, and reduced supplies of fresh water.' Everyone wants to talk about their particular piece of turf. But this is a problem that is intrinsically and

¹⁶Peter N. Spotts, "In wake of latest climate report, calls mount for global response," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 5, 2007.

fundamentally global.”¹⁷ While focusing on our own local communities, we begin to discover that we are intrinsically connected to the global community, as the recent economic crisis so dramatically shown us.

The environmental crisis, specifically global warming, raises not only scientific questions but also deeply moral, religious and epistemological ones about how we know what we know and what really matters. Religion working with science is the next logical phase in this epistemological approach to mitigating the environmental crisis. The groundbreaking work of scholars at the Forum for Religion and Ecology (FORE) describes the role religious institutions and their members play in addressing the environmental challenge:

For many years science, engineering, policy, and law alone were considered indispensable to solving environmental problems. We now have abundant knowledge from these disciplines about environmental issues, but still not sufficient will to change. Daily, local restorations are occurring but still we see widespread global ecological degradation. We sense that we are losing ground. Thus, there is a growing realization that religion, spirituality, ethics, and values can make important contributions to address complex environmental concerns.¹⁸

More recently, Sam Mickey and Elizabeth McAnally, web content managers and newsletter editors of FORE, offered another perspective to the work of the Forum for Religion and Ecology - joyful attention to the meaning and value of the material world, or “re-enchantment.”¹⁹

Re-enchantment indicates “the possibility of overcoming the modern view of the material world as completely separate from the world of meaning, value, holiness, spirit,

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸<http://www.religionandecology.org> (accessed January 16, 2007).

¹⁹Sam Mickey and Elizabeth McAnally, eds., “The Forum on Religion and Ecology Newsletter,” 2.12 December 2008, 1-2.

<http://fore.research.yale.edu/publications/newsletters/December2008.html#editorialnews@religionandecology.org> (accessed February 16, 2009).

and divinity.”²⁰ Amidst of frightening economic and environmental statistics there is a joyful playfulness displayed in art work and in music that is being presented at many ecology conferences that I have attended in the past year. With the backdrop of a gripping worldwide economic crisis and continued destruction of the natural environment conference attendees at Trinity Institute’s 2009 conference on “Radical Abundance,” held at the historic Trinity Church in New York City, experienced the wonder and joy of music and art. Re-enchantment is an “intriguing concept ...used in efforts to articulate the possibility of developing a worldview for which the material world is intimately intertwined with meaning and holiness.”²¹ Just as in the nineteenth century poet and essayist Henry David Thoreau wrote in the language of awe and respect for the sacredness of nature, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries poet Mary Oliver gives us the language of the re-enchantment to move our hearts to action. As Oliver sings of her calling, her “work,” in her first poem, “Messenger,” from her collection, *Thirst*,

My work is loving the world.
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird --
equal seekers of sweetness.
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me
keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work...²²

Mickey and McAnally note that our work to re-enchant the world takes many forms:

The re-enchantment of the world involves religious practitioners showing how their traditions can facilitate engagements with the eco-social realities of this world, rather than being exclusively other-worldly. Re-enchanting the world also

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Mary Oliver, *Thirst* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006), 1.

involves scientists showing how the narratives of contemporary scientific research articulate a universe that is pervaded by mystery, value, and meaning, rather than a mechanistic universe devoid of any inherent value. The re-enchantment of the world does not entail a rejection of modernity or a regression to pre-modern or pre-scientific worldviews. Rather, re-enchantment opens possibilities for new understandings in which religious and scientific practices can function as co-creative partners and not simply as mutually exclusive opposites.²³

I was particularly taken by the description of re-enchantment from the use of its musical metaphor. The verb “enchant” derives from the Latin *incantare*, where *cantare* means “to sing.” As Mickey and McAnally write, “Perhaps it was the disenchantment of the world that Rachel Carson was expressing when she wrote *Silent Spring*, warning that uncontrolled pesticide use would kill many animals, especially the birds whose singing voices would resound throughout springtime.”²⁴ Carson’s disenchantment came to mind when I heard the 92 year jazz pianist Mary McParker play her musical tribute, *A Portrait of Rachel Carson*, as part of the Trinity Institute’s conference this year. McParker’s extraordinary solo performance at the piano in Trinity Church was immeasurably deepened by the recordings of birds that sang along with her playing throughout the first part of her original composition. This piece was dedicated to Carson’s pioneering work in environmentalism, particularly her 1962 book *Silent Spring*, which revealed the dangers of DDT. *A Portrait of Rachel Carson* was an enchanting composition where beautiful music followed the scientific data presented by the speakers at the conference, all of whom attended the performance. With McParker’s musical tribute in my heart and memory, I hold onto this concept of re-enchantment while reviewing the grim statistics reported two years ago, statistics that were forecast by Rachel Carson over four decades ago.

²³Sam Mickey and Elizabeth McAnally, eds., “The Forum on Religion and Ecology Newsletter,” 2.12 December 2008, 1-2.

²⁴Ibid.

The February 2, 2007 release of a much-anticipated and globally authoritative report on global warming from the United Nation's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) asks a profound question of humanity: What do you want your climate to look like over the next several centuries? The report states in unequivocal terms that the climate is warming globally, and, that since the middle of the twentieth century, human industrial activity – the burning of fossil fuels and, to a lesser extent, land-use changes – is the warming's main driver. Since the last report in 2001, confidence in that statement has risen from "likely" (greater than a 66 per cent chance) to "very likely" (greater than 90 percent).²⁵ Beyond detailing current and projected effects of warming – including rising sea-levels, vanishing alpine glaciers, and increases in severe-weather events, the report projects centuries of rising temperatures and sea levels unless there are curbs in emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that trap heat in the atmosphere. Scientists involved in writing or reviewing the report state it is nearly certain that there is at least a 90 percent chance that human-caused emissions are the main factor in warming.²⁶ It is Western nations, and the United States in particular, that continue to lead the world in the use of oil and other fossil fuels with little regard for the effect of such actions on global neighbors.

With this initial report, the truth of global warming is obvious, but more is needed than merely to prove that global warming is real. We need the moral will and courage to face up to this truth, for in the words of Jesus, "The truth will set you free."²⁷ As novelist Maxine Hong Kingston notes, "All human beings have this burden in life to constantly

²⁵Peter N. Spotts, "Climate Report," 2.

²⁶James Kanter and Andrew Revkin, "World Scientists Near Consensus on Warming," *New York Times*, January 30, 2007.

²⁷John 8:22. All Biblical translations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

figure out what's true, what's authentic, what's meaningful, what's dross, what's a hallucination, what's a figment, what's a madness. We all need to figure out what is valuable, constantly."²⁸ Only when people, Americans in particular, have faced up to the truth of global warming and the value of living on this planet will we have the courage to act. Neither fear nor reassurance are conducive to permanent change in human behavior, and change is what is required if human beings, and Americans in particular, are going to face the truth of global warming.

Achim Steiner, the executive director of the United Nations Environment Program, said the findings presented February 2, 2007 should lead decision makers to accelerate efforts to slash carbon emissions and to help people in vulnerable parts of the world prepare for climate change. "These findings should strengthen the resolve of governments to act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and put in place the medium- to-longer-term strategies necessary to avert dangerous climate change."²⁹ "We basically have three choices: mitigation, adaptation and suffering," said John Holdren, the president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and an energy and climate expert at Harvard. "We're going to do some of each. The question is what the mix is going to be. The more mitigation we do, the less adaptation will be required and the less suffering there will be."³⁰ Mitigation is the goal; recognition of the suffering of the planet resulting from androgenic activity, stemming largely from a patriarchal epistemology, cannot be circumvented. Change in behavior must be made.

²⁸ Maxine Hong Kingston comment on "Discovering What Democracy Means," http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2007/02/12/discovering_what_deomcracy_means.php, (accessed Feb 12, 2007).

²⁹ James Kanter and Andrew Revkin, "World Scientists."

³⁰ Ibid.

A patriarchal epistemology has a limited worldview and has immeasurably wounded our world; it is not representative of a global community as promulgated in the Earth Charter. The global community continues to suffer under the oppressive weight of Western industrialization and technological advancement. One way to begin mitigation is to acknowledge the Western church's role in the environmental crisis, to find the hurts and then to gradually shift the rules of the game. Confessing one's own role in promoting Western imperialism and its historic accompanying lack of concern for the environment can move communities closer to finding a means for mitigation. Christians may find the best place to begin is with Jesus himself. Theologian Joerg Rieger writes, "(Jesus') strange not-fitting-in might help us to get in touch with context not as what we consider closest to home, but as 'that which hurts' and thus to shift the rules of the game."³¹ There needs to be a unity of purpose, and it cannot come solely from mandated governmental policies. This unity of purpose seems to be especially urgent for the citizens of the United States, whose own especially arrogant governmental policies and will to combat global warming are lagging behind those of European nations.

Moving from a patriarchal to an ecofeminist epistemology places the focus on those who have been first and most oppressed by the environmental crisis. As Ivone Gebara prophetically writes in the Introduction to *Longing for Running Water*,

If all of humanity, the inhabitants of the entire earth are to take on the task of saving their own lives along with the life of the earth, world religions would inevitably make this project their own. And as they became converted to this urgent and fundamental cause, they would have to modify some of their intellectual constructs along with the power structures that uphold them.³²

³¹ Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire From Paul to Postcolonial Times*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 9.

³² Gebara, *Longing*, 7.

Critically examining the roots of a Western church's patriarchal epistemology and shifting to an ecofeminist epistemology are approaches to how world religions, here specifically Western Christianity, may yet have a vital role to play in the health of the planet and all its inhabitants. Our task, Gebara writes, is to "stop and think about these issues and then to help people who are interested by making it possible for them to understand the personal and collective consequences of their styles of knowing. Our duty is to raise the levels of our awareness."³³

In the critical book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold uses this language of awareness in his argument for the study of ecology. Throughout this book, originally divided into twelve segments, one for each month, with anecdotes and observations about flora and fauna, Leopold argues that humans must shift their focus away from viewing society as like a hypochondriac – "so obsessed with its own economic health that it has lost the capacity to remain healthy."³⁴ He argues for a "revolt against the tedium of the merely economic attitude toward land."³⁵ Instead of an economic model, Leopold shifts the epistemology and shows that real health comes not from economic rushes but from learning from nature. His development of a "land ethic," at the heart of his almanac, demonstrates that the land is the bedrock and source of all human culture. He writes, "A land ethic changes the role of 'homo sapiens' from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such."³⁶ But when Leopold talks further about the community as the beneficiary of environmental moral concern, no anthropocentric focus is given; no

³³Ibid., 29-30.

³⁴Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 57.

³⁵Ibid., 203.

³⁶Ibid., 204.

mention is made of “fellow-members.” “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”³⁷ That was almost sixty years ago. No one writes any more about a solution to the environmental disaster, because there is none.

Anthropomorphism, Anthropocentrism and Anthropogenic Activity³⁸

Anthropomorphism, anthropocentrism and anthropogenic activity lie at the heart of the interpretation of Biblical and Western concepts of progress and history, with promised increase in goods and people to those who have been obedient to God. In *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, Regina Schwartz describes the world of the Hebrew Scriptures as one in conflict – for territory, for food and for power. The narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures reflect a world of scarce resources and violent competition for goods. Biblical stories also describe intolerance about people and cultures different than one’s own ethnic tribe. Reading the Scriptures with her students, one of them asked Professor Schwartz, “What about the Canaanites?” The rest of *The Curse of Cain* is in many ways a response to that searing question. Schwartz’s thesis that the Bible does indeed offer glimpses of monotheist plenitude instead of scarcity reminds us that these moments of plenitude have not held the same command in American politics as the scarcity model has. In *The Curse of Cain* Schwartz invites the reader not only to think of new ways to read the encoded Bible of scarcity, but also to revision the Bible. She proposes an alternative Bible that subverts the dominant vision of violence and scarcity

³⁷Ibid., 224-225.

³⁸Anthropomorphism is the assignment of human characteristics to things not human. Anthropogenic activity is the human participation in economic degradation chiefly through the production of carbon dioxide, thereby increasing one’s ecological footprint, believed to be the primary factor contributing to climate change. Anthropocentrism views human beings as the center of all activity.

with an ideal of generosity and its corollary ethical imperative of generosity.³⁹ Short of proposing an alternative Scripture, Gebara proposes an alternative epistemology that demonstrates that scarcity comes from oppression: an androgenic, anthropomorphic God takes away abundance from Adam and Eve and others in the prehistory of Genesis 1 – 11; the stories contained in the saga of Abraham continue this colonialist approach to land and others' possessions. Abraham and his descendents are constantly looking to increase both in tribal descendents and in land as their God promises them in covenants made with their tribe.

Gebara reminds us that patriarchal theology, and especially creation theology, “legitimized both oppression and domination of nature and the existence of hierarchical relationships among all beings.”⁴⁰ The story of Moses and the Ten Commandments underscores God's role as giver of the law. The numerous examples from the Psalms and throughout the Torah portray God, Yahweh, as having control over all nature, including control of seas to flood if one's enemies are passing over. Such texts that portray a powerful God having control over all forces, and even seeming to pit peoples against each other, often with “acts of God” – floods, windstorms, earthquakes, and the like – cause many Jews and Christians to quake. Is it true to a loving God's nature to be so willful and destructive? As Gebara notes, “Even so, the Christian tradition that dominated the West held on to the idea that God stands above nature as Creator and Lawgiver. Nature is somehow subject to the divine will. In that sense, it is by divine command that nature gives us what we need in order to live.”⁴¹

³⁹Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁴⁰Gebara, *Longing*, 16.

⁴¹Ibid.

In the Scriptures of the Western church, here specifically the Hebrew Scriptures,⁴² the images and description of human's role in the world are very patriarchal, especially the family saga of Abraham beginning in chapter 12 of the Book of Genesis. Chapter 12 is largely a starting over of the story begun in the first chapter of Genesis. In Genesis, Chapter 1, a world has been created out of nothing by a Creator who appears out of nowhere. By the end of this initial chapter, human beings, made in the "image" of the Creator God, are put in charge of the rest of the created order, told to multiply and "fill the earth and subdue it." (See Genesis 1:26 -28) This is language of oppression, and the story continues for ten more chapters until there is a new beginning with the patriarch Abraham, but there is another theme that needs to be noted. While underscoring the theme that a patriarchal God is in charge, it is important to note that the punishment of Adam, Eve, Cain and the people of the flood, except for Noah and his family, is alienation from the natural world.

Before Abraham's arrival on the scene, it is interesting to see a pattern of seeming generosity - the Creator is filling up the world with things and human beings, until the flood described in chapters 6 – 9. In chapter ten, Noah's son's descendants are listed. The Tower of Babel story concludes this first prehistory section. At the same time as there is an increase of people (is more always better?), there is increased alienation from the natural environment. Because of his disobedience to the creator Lord God, Adam is "cursed from the ground" and the soil will not yield easily to him. "...in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field." (Genesis 3:17) Eve, the tempter, will be cursed in childbirth

⁴²The use of the term, "Old Testament" is offensive to many, implying that the Hebrew Scriptures are incomplete and stagnant. This too can be viewed as patriarchal.

(Genesis 3:16). Cain, second son of Adam and Eve, is cursed from the ground because of his murder of his brother Abel (Genesis 4:11). Furthermore, like the experience of his father, Cain finds that ground will be alien to him, as will be the land in which he has resided. “When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (Genesis 4:12).

In the final story of the opening section of Genesis, only Noah and his family are spared the flood that God sends upon the earth. “Go into the ark, you and your entire household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation,” (Genesis 7:1) commands God to Noah. In the final chapter in this story, God blesses Noah and his sons, and tells them what God told Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” (Genesis 9:1) The command to increase descendents and fill the earth brings reward - destruction of all people and alienation from the natural world. At the end of the story God makes a covenant with creation to never flood the earth again” (Genesis 9:15). The Noah story does more than explain why a flood would engulf the world. It also reminds the hearer and reader that nature is a force. In the Biblical tradition, nature is a force controlled by a capricious God who hands out reward and punishment based on humanity’s obedience to God’s rules. The myths of Genesis chapters 1 – 11 illustrate, teach, and underscore a patriarchal epistemology. The desire to placate a capricious God is intrinsic to patriarchal structures, often prevailing in the structures of the Western Church.

In each of these stories from Genesis 1 – 11, disobedience to the God that controls nature causes human alienation from nature. This seems an odd sort of punishment. What is God trying to teach the first men and women by such banishment? To be separated

from the earth, to be a fugitive and a wanderer, will continue a cycle of alienation from nature that was begun by Adam and Eve's disobedience. These etiological tales from the first chapters of Genesis have been with Christians from the early days of the church. While St. Francis of Assisi is a notable exception, the Christian tradition that has prevailed in the West teaches that God stands above nature as Lord, Creator and Law Giver. It seems that it was not until the twentieth century that writers began to examine the role that the Western Church has played in the alienation of people from nature.

The Environmental Crisis Is a Religious Crisis

It was Lynn White, in his seminal and controversial article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," who identified the environmental crisis as essentially a religious one. If the environmental crisis is fundamentally a religious dilemma, then religions and Christianity in particular, bear the responsibility to provide some of the solutions, or at least, mitigation, if not remedies, as Aldo Leopold had envisioned. Christianity may provide an example in Jesus' willingness to go to the places of deepest hurt in society,⁴³ as well as in Jesus' uses of natural objects (i.e., soil, seeds, earth, fish, and water) in both parables and healing stories. However, Western Christians will need to work hard to avoid the pitfalls of holding to a monochromatic and Western notion that "Daddy knows best." Many have left organized religion and Christianity in particular, because Christianity is no longer seen as relevant or viable in its continued patriarchal and imperialistic Western ways.

But hope springs eternal. Organized religions may indeed offer strategies for problem-solving on a scale that even the U.S. government seems not always able to provide (witness the Episcopal Church's incredibly efficient response to the disaster of

⁴³ Rieger, p. 9.

Hurricane Katrina, for one). Religions also demonstrate that even, and especially, the most negligent among them can turn practices around to partner with scientific, political and civic communities in earth care. And every day articles appear in print and online about partnerships in religion and ecology as people of faith work together for shared goals of creation care. An explosion of -scholarship in the growing field of Religion and Ecology, as evidenced in publishing, especially with the work of the Forum for Religion and Ecology underscores the level of scholarly commitment to this emerging academic field. Growing collaboration in grassroots efforts, such as the Regeneration Project with state affiliates called “Interfaith Power & Light which are currently in 27 states, including my own Vermont, as well as newly formed collaborations with individuals and judicatories, e.g., Massachusetts Interfaith Climate Action Network (MCAN), showcase alliances of religion and ecology at the local, state and national levels.

In the Diocese of Vermont, Bishop Thomas Ely chose sustainability as the central theme of its 2008 Convention. The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church urged this theme to be the focus of all diocesan conventions.⁴⁴ In my own parish, for example, people have been attracted to St. Peter’s not because of our being the Episcopal Church in town, but specifically because we are engaged in the field of sustainability. Scholars and religious leaders, e.g., the Greek Orthodox theologian Metropolitan John of Pergamon, have written that the problem is not simply about creating a stewardship ethic in which humans “manage” the earth. Metropolitan John of Pergamon suggests that we need a new ontology,⁴⁵ a new way of understanding our nature as humans.⁴⁶ Fresh insights from

⁴⁴In conversation with me on November 3, 2007 in Burlington, VT.

⁴⁵Ontology, from the field of philosophy, is a way of understanding the nature of reality.

⁴⁶Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, “Daring to Dream: Religion and the Future of the Earth” in *Reflections: God’s Green Earth: Creation, Faith, Crisis* (Spring 2007):7.

liberation theologians as well as Engaged Buddhists move us from colonial practices, imperialistic theology and anthropocentric, patriarchal epistemology to other ways of seeing humanity's place and role in the universe. Fresh insights for and a new ontology in the development of an environmental ethic were introduced decades ago in the writing of Lynn White.

In "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," White sees Western Christianity as promoting human dominance over nature, and hence, contributing to the environmental crisis. White makes the assertion that what we do collectively depends on what we think collectively. He asserts the corollary as well: that to change what we collectively do depends on changing what we collectively think. The conclusion, then, is that to change what we do to the environment, human beings must begin by changing what we think about the environment.⁴⁷ That will not be easy to do, for "both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone... We must rethink and re-feel our nature and destiny."⁴⁸ White concludes by commending the Christian followers of Francis, Franciscans, for their espousing "the spiritual autonomy of all parts of nature."⁴⁹ He proposes Francis as "patron saint for ecologists."⁵⁰ Indeed, Francis has become the patron saint of ecologists in America, and yet, most Americans remain deeply alienated from nature, and the situation appears to be only getting worse.

⁴⁷White, 8.

⁴⁸Ibid.,9.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

A recent condition described as Nature Deficit Disorder has raised concern about the health effects of children being alienated from nature. In his *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv cites startling statistics. Average eight-year olds are better able to identify cartoon characters than native species, such as beetles and oak trees, in their own community. Nature deficit disorder is not a medical condition; it is a description of the human costs of alienation from nature. According to Louv, this alienation damages children and shapes adults, families and communities.⁵¹

Over the years, learning and appreciating creation more than I did perhaps growing up in the beautiful countryside of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, I have come to see how closely connected the language of biology, astronomy, geology, philosophy, poetry and theology really are. Humans are really not that important in the scheme of things. This should be good news for it takes a patriarchal burden off our shoulders! In her book, *Small Wonder*, Barbara Kingsolver writes about coming to know God in creation:

I never knew what grand really was until I saw the (Grand) Canyon. It's a perspective that pulls the busy human engine of desires to a quiet halt. Taking the long view across that vermilion abyss attenuates humanity to quieter internal rhythms, the spirit of ice ages, and we look, we gasp, and it seems there is a chance we might be small enough not to matter. That the things we want are not the end of the world. I have needed this view lately.⁵²

When I recalled this passage, I pondered the way Kingsolver described humanity's insignificance and how Kingsolver marveled at how the language of "quieter internal rhythms" and the insignificance of the individual echoes themes of Buddhist environmentalists like Thich Nhat Hanh. If from a Buddhist perspective our relationship

⁵¹ Richard Louv: *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature- Deficit Disorder*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005) , 43.

⁵² Barbara Kingsolver, *Small Wonder*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 22.

to all of creation is intrinsically moral,⁵³ and all relationships are causal (*pattica samuppada*), then the environmental reality is an ethical crisis for all religious people around the globe. A Buddhist environmental worldview shares much with an eco-feminist epistemology, for a Buddhist worldview “understands a healthy relationship when one lives in harmony with the cosmos,”⁵⁴ where we can tread lightly on this earth.⁵⁵ While non-violent earth treading may sound like a very passive action (as some accuse Jesus of being passive in his command to “turn the other cheek”), David E. Cooper and Simon P. James give the antidote to passivity as responsibility, “the virtue exemplified by the woman who, in truly appreciating the gravity of a certain environmental problem, is spurred to act.”⁵⁶

More than ever before, human beings, particularly in the United States, are alienated from nature. This alienation however, is not God’s punishment, but self-imposed and escalating punishment that is a direct result of rampant consumerism, perpetuating -an unhealthy belief that what humans own defines who they are. As the bumper sticker reminds me, “The best things in life aren’t things.” The technological advancements of the last two centuries underscore the androgenic falsehood that human importance is based on how much we rationally know, how much we possess and consume. As Sallie McFague so aptly states this moral dilemma: “...The problem is not that Americans do not love nature, but that they are enmeshed in a success story - the

⁵³ Swearer, “Principles and Poetry,” 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁵ Gary Snyder in David E. Cooper and Simon P. James, *Buddhism, Virtue and Environment*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 31 and 134.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 135.

consumer one – that is ruining the planet.”⁵⁷ Consumerism is causing indescribable suffering and disconnection with our local and global communities.

Religious Networks in Create Networks in Support of the Natural World

The antidote to such alienation rests not only in getting outdoors, but also in following the practices of religious communities, here specifically, the deep wisdom of Buddhism and ecofeminist epistemology. Community narratives as well as pilgrims reveal that mountains, for instance, carry universal healing messages about the mutual benefits derived when human beings set apart natural places to be visited and revered. Together ancient texts and modern pilgrims continue to tell stories and reveal deep truths about the importance of sacred places in the universe. It may not be as simple as just getting outdoors, away from our built communities, but getting away from built environments is a big step forward to seeing one's place in the universe while experiencing the emotional well-being that comes with feeling connected to something that is much larger than one's own immediate concerns. Getting outside forces one to confront one's place in the universe.

Exploration of nature by people of all ages and religious practice helps to expand the cultural imagination the seeker brings to the ecological crisis. Sooner or later the pilgrim comes to the realization, cultural stereotypes and patriarchalism to the contrary, that nature, especially wild nature, is not something that humans can control. In an increasingly technological society, the more information humans possess, the more opportunity humans have to try to build and control their environment. Nature reminds us that there are still things in life that we cannot control – wind, rain, snow, hail, sleet. Yes,

⁵⁷Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 199.

snow can be made at ski resorts, but we can't control the temperature that permits snow to be made. Nature is still a force that cannot be controlled by humans.

The alienation from the natural world that children experience today, even in such beautiful communities as my own in rural Southwest Vermont where the mountains are quite literally all around us, is frightening and sad. It is quite different from my own upbringing in the rolling farmlands of Lancaster, PA, where playing outside every day and eating locally grown food were not luxuries, but part of one's everyday practices. Every day a rigorous walk to school revealed new things to be explored in nature. There was a great desire to stay connected to the "great outdoors," and a respect for what the earth could provide. This daily dose of nature can help create a respect for and a relationship to all beings while keeping in check one's own worth in the context of the biosphere.

If all epistemologies lead us to ethical issues,⁵⁸ then an epistemology that is more inclusive than the one which most people in the Western world have inherited will lead us to those most oppressed by an epistemology that benefits the rich and resourceful. . It can be very threatening to give up part of one's worldview that has insured a secure place in society. It might even feel like being a fugitive as Cain was a wanderer in the wilderness. The benefit of exploring an ecofeminist epistemology is that it invites a reciprocity not heretofore embraced by the Western church. An ecofeminist epistemology does not limit ways of knowing, it embraces telling stories of one's local community while recognizing the diversity of human experiences.⁵⁹ It acknowledges that there is so much we do not now know – and may never know. This viewpoint comes very close to

⁵⁸Gebara, *Longing*, 23.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 64.

what some in the church call the “mystery of God.” An embrace of not knowing, of acknowledging the mystery of God and all creation, requires humility and detachment. The detachment from previously held convictions of power and domination and the need to know everything in order to wield control over others is very liberating to both the oppressed and oppressor. An ecofeminist theology welcomes voices from diverse religious experience and traditions. And, best of all, “this epistemology relativizes our ambition to dominate the world through the development of sciences and of the various kinds of imperialism they bring with them.”⁶⁰ This is not a linear process of knowing, but rather one that is complex and in constant flux⁶¹ as we adapt a more inclusive way of knowing to the development of an environmental ethic. This epistemology embraces all religious practices and traditions that aspire to adopt practices that seek harmony with nature, and not domination of or alienation from it. Or, in the thinking of Leopold Aldo, this epistemology is right when “it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”⁶²

Ecofeminist epistemology provides a model of how to be courageous in welcoming the unfamiliar idea while encouraging mutually beneficial partnerships between diverse religious traditions and cultures. Pain and suffering brought to the planet and its inhabitants can be ameliorated only when honest conversation occurs between the voices of power and the voices of the marginalized and oppressed. Mitigation begins when people face up to the challenge of suffering and then create meaningful networks of support. Creating these networks takes hard work, but the rewards are there for everyone, and everything. As John Brueggemann explains about the meaning of power,

⁶⁰Ibid., 55.

⁶¹Ibid, 55.

⁶²Leopold, 224-225.

(Emile) Durkheim explained that the key to facing the challenges of life, such as pain, loss, and death, is maintaining networks of relationships or, in a word, community. He famously documented the connections between rates of suicide and social ties. Meaningful relationships diminish the likelihood that a person will take his or her own life. Those bound to the group are needed and supported. When you are enmeshed in community, folks around you demand that you show up to fulfill your obligations, and they promise that if you do, they will take care of you.

This is a very difficult time in terms of the problem of meaning. There is more activity than ever before in human history. People are busy. They are in some sense more social – that is, in a quantitative sense, in terms of the number of people with whom they interact. But they are less social in another, qualitative sense. The networks of relationships are in many cases thin or superficial.⁶³

Networks of relationships that are neither thin nor superficial and are multi-faceted and interreligious need to be embraced and adopted in this work of environmental improvement for without the creating of community on the order of the Earth Charter humans will become increasingly alienated from themselves and all other inhabitants on the planet. Such networks include resources of Third World ecofeminist theologians as well as Engaged Buddhists, which will be described in chapters two and three, respectively. Healthy religious communities are first and foremost places of engagement where people come for healing and wholeness. We need communities of faith who have both the will and the denominational heart and structure at both the local and the national levels⁶⁴ to implement new and tough requirements to dramatically reduce global warming – before it is too late. Moving away from a patriarchal, imperialist view of humans dominating nature to human beings viewed as part of the web of all life forms, we discover the common desires for “deepest wellbeing, happiness and joy”⁶⁵ of all

⁶³ John Brueggemann, “Negotiating the Meaning of Power and the Power of Meaning,” *Theology Today* (January 2007): 485-486.

⁶⁴ The Episcopal Church of the United States showed this admirably in its quick response to the Hurricane Katrina – much quicker than the government or other local agencies.

⁶⁵ John Makransky and Philip Osgood, *Awakening Through Love: Unveiling Your Deepest Goodness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007). A favorite expression of Professor and Tibetan lama John Makransky

beings, beginning with our local communities. Bennington, Vermont is my local community. Therefore, it is the focus of my environmental ministry.

The Local Community of Bennington

The total population of Bennington, Vermont, is 22,984. With the exception of the Town of Bennington (pop. 15,349) the community is rural. Of the total population, 36.5% are under the age of 18.⁶⁶ There is minimal ethnic diversity in the community; almost 99% of the population is white. There is however, significant economic diversity and significant poverty in the community. The issues of cultural sensitivity in this community have to do primarily with people who are at risk due to poor economic and educational circumstances. Using family receipt of food stamps as an indicator for poverty, 23.1% of children ages 0-18 in the community live in poverty.⁶⁷

The area has significant problems with underemployment. Many jobs are available only part time. These jobs do not offer a living wage, nor do they offer benefits. It is not uncommon for adults raising families in the Bennington area to work two or even three jobs to make ends meet. The area also suffers from a severe lack of affordable housing, both in the rental and in the owned-housing markets. People in low-income situations feel the actual impact of the growing oil crisis. The gas guzzling SUVs of the past decade have become the used-car deals of today, but they come with a huge price as families struggle to pay for fuel to keep them on the road. Transportation costs have sent food prices soaring.

and used throughout his text, and throughout his lectures at Boston College, Theology 522, "Buddhist Meditation Theory: Tibet," Fall 2007.

⁶⁶Community Profile for the Community Served by Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union, 13, Vermont Agency of Human Services Planning Division, March 2008.

⁶⁷Ibid.

The economic shift that has been experienced in Bennington over the past few decades has left it a deeply troubled place in an economic sense. Originally an agricultural community, the Bennington area made the transition into manufacturing jobs decades ago. As jobs have moved “off-shore,” local manufacturing endeavors have moved on, leaving behind low-paying, part-time jobs in the service sector, which do not pay a living wage. The response of the state and local social service organizations has been to characterize the people who have been affected as having “needs” or “problems” that must be solved. By developing programs to meet the needs, the human service sector has taught people “the nature and extent of their problems and the value of services as the answer to their problems.”⁶⁸ This approach has the unfortunate result of convincing residents that their well-being depends upon being participants in these programs.⁶⁹ The traditional response to needs in Bennington is that agencies and programs have tried to solve problems by doing things for or providing services to the target population. In a large sense, this approach is merely a stopgap measure. It also encourages residents to begin to think about themselves as fundamentally deficient and unable to meet their own needs.⁷⁰

There are many families in Bennington and the surrounding area who are unable to live from month to month without experiencing a financial crisis requiring them to seek emergency assistance. The most common cause of these financial crises is a combination of low income, high housing and utility costs, the occasional unanticipated expense, and lack of basic life skills. Religious leaders, social workers and school teachers, for example, daily observe a segregation of opportunity as played out in education and jobs;

⁶⁸Sue Andrews, Proposal for "Ben & Jerry's Capacity Building Multi-Year Grant Program," April 28, 2008.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

evidence of uneven access to housing, nutritious food, medical care, heating fuels; and social isolation characterized by fear, anxiety and lack of meaningful relationships.

"The cloud of hopelessness that has hung over the Bennington area in recent years is being replaced by a growing sense of desperation among people living here."⁷¹ Formerly an area with numerous manufacturing jobs, Bennington County has seen the erosion of economic security and loss of jobs over the last several decades. The economic boom of the 1990s did not reach this rural enclave. Today, the economy in the Bennington area is driven, in general, by smaller businesses and not-for-profit corporations. Major employers include Southwestern Vermont Health Care (the area's largest employer), United Counseling Services, Bennington College, Southern Vermont College, the State of Vermont, and the five local school districts. Nonprofit agencies and religious communities offer numerous services and resources for people desperate to find meaning, purpose and financial and health resources in their daily lives.

The Bennington Interfaith Council is a network of 16 different faith communities representing nine different religions in the greater Bennington area. Members of the Council meet monthly to come together in fellowship and to plan shared community activities and endeavors. Historically, individual members of the clergy of the various faith communities served the Food and Fuel Fund (FFF) in the role of volunteer manager. Two years ago, the Council re-evaluated the significant level of effort that was going into managing the fund and decided to commit to paying a part-time manager. One year ago, the FFF made the transition to its first non-clergy fund manager by hiring a professional grant writer with strong connections to the health and human services sector, who is also actively involved in her own faith community. This change paralleled the decision of the

⁷¹Ibid.

Board to make a paradigm shift from “alms giving” to involving the people it serves in bettering their lives through pro-active measures and recognizing and developing strength-based assets.

In December 2008 The Food and Fuel Fund expanded its 501 c (3) status to become the Greater Bennington Interfaith Community Services, Inc. (GBICS) whose mission statement is,

to provide free primary medical care, care coordination, mentoring, referral, and financial support for basic human needs such as food, fuel, clothing and shelter to qualifying financially needy individuals and families in Bennington and the surrounding community.

In February 2009, a Board of Directors, separate from the Interfaith Council, but including members of the Council as well as members of the local faith communities, replaced the Interfaith Council in its former position as the Food and Fuel Fund’s Board of Directors. The current plan is to increase the capacity of the GBICS to work with its constituents to identify and develop assets upon which to build a more just future using methods of asset based community development (ABCD). According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation “justice can be achieved only when people gain the political and economic power necessary to make key decisions about their futures, and the future of their communities.”⁷² Moving up and out of poverty requires not just a stream of income but also a reservoir of personal and community assets of responsibility.⁷³

Responsibility

All epistemologies will lead us to ethical issues of responsibility. It is often hard for Americans to avoid getting caught up in the language of “rights,” particularly as the word appears in the United States Constitution and implies power and privilege – more

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

colonialism! In spite of the fact that Americans claim there are certain “unalienable rights,” surely we know that not all Americans possess these rights as outlined in our Constitution. Rights often imply privilege or entitlement, concepts contrary to the humility and compassion for all beings upheld in Buddhism and taught by Jesus. The better word choice is responsibility. In developing an ecofeminist epistemology we ask, what is the responsible way to respond to the degradation of nature? Being responsible in twenty-first century America means creating new interreligious networks and dialogue based on mutuality and trust, and care for all life forms. Give up the patriarchy of oppression that has so negatively affected the development of Christianity in the West and so influenced the church’s role in Western industrialization. Embrace an epistemology based on mutuality of interdependence of all life forms. Such an epistemology “depends on understanding that we as human beings are inextricably linked to nature.”⁷⁴ Buddhism and ecofeminism have much to offer in creating a more equitable epistemology for the twenty-first century pilgrim.

The world is our practice ground and we have only one chance – our life. In practicing we don’t always get it right – that’s why we need to engage with one another in community, to keep a check on one another-. That is why in a global community we need to learn from the traditions that have historically understood and lived all creation as a precious gift. While recapturing the elements of Christian teaching and practice that may have been submerged under a deep and heavy cloak of patriarchalism, I hope that teachings of Western Engaged Buddhism and ecofeminists will begin to offer the healing antidote to the environmental oppression that has been a result of Western and often Christian imperialism . Third World ecofeminism and Engaged Buddhism will show us a

⁷⁴ Don Swearer, “Principles and Poetry, Places and Stories,” 9.

way out of our destructive consuming paths. And so, I now turn to ecofeminists and then, in chapter three, to Engaged Buddhists in adopting an interreligious interdisciplinary epistemology to address the suffering brought about by the anthropogenic activity.

CHAPTER TWO

Out of the Depths: The Role of Suffering in the Life of Women and the Planet¹

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture.

Still treat each guest honorably,
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.²

Embrace suffering, even welcome it? Is this a way to live? To embrace suffering, to know the present moment of suffering as the perfect teacher, is a critical component to the dharma I learned from Lama John Makransky in a course on Tibetan Buddhism in the fall of 2007 at Boston College. I was pleasantly surprised to discover a course in Tibetan Buddhism offered at a predominantly Roman Catholic college outside Boston. An epistemology of suffering is fundamental to developing an ecofeminist justice model for

¹I am indebted to Ivone Gebara for her reinterpretation of the phrase "Out of the Depths," the title of one of the texts cited in this thesis. She is reinterpreting Psalm 130.

²A poem by Persian poet Rumi in Jack Kornfield, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry, How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), xi.

the local community. As First World Christian theologian Sallie McFague describes the suffering of those most vulnerable in communities around the world,

In an ecological age when the development of our sensibility concerning the vulnerability and destruction of nonhuman creatures and the natural environment is critical, we ought to focus on one: the inclusion of the neglected oppressed - the planet itself and its many different creatures, including outcast human ones...God's love is unlimited and oriented especially toward the oppressed - whoever the oppressed turn out to be at a particular time.³

God's love, and God's love as it is made known in Jesus, is always oriented toward the oppressed and those who suffer. The Jesus who is called Lord and Savior specifically addressed his ministry to those most impoverished by the dominant structures in society. Jesus embraced suffering, and so must we.

Storytelling and Epistemology

This chapter explores the epistemology of suffering not only as a critical narrative for feminist theologians, but also for all people and all life forms on the planet earth. How does suffering lead to awakening, and once awakened how do we re-connect to the relationships vital for life flourishing? What can the personal narratives teach us about suffering brought about primarily by the Western world's anthropogenic activity? Here anthropogenic activity is understood as human participation in economic degradation chiefly through the production of carbon dioxide, believed to be the primary factor contributing to climate change. Anthropogenic activity is one of the manifestations of anthropocentrism where human beings are viewed as the center of activity. Recounting

³ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God : An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 164.

personal narratives, or storytelling, “becomes a starting point to give voice to do social analysis.”⁴ Stories create community in ways that social analysis cannot achieve.

With the publication of *Women Who Run With The Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, American poet, psychoanalyst and post-trauma specialist Clarissa Pinkola Estes (b. 1943) changed the way storytelling was perceived in the field of both women’s studies as well as psychotherapy. Raised in a small rural village near the Great Lakes, of Mexican mestizo and Magyar heritages, Este grew up with immigrant and refugee families who could not read or write. Storytelling, and the ability to remember stories, is the chief vehicle by which refugee communities are formed and strengthened. Stories serve as powerful reminders that community is not sustained through domination and power, but through love and remembrance.

People are starved for poetry, starved for things that strengthen them," she began. "There are any number of so-called self-help books and tapes on the market, but I don't think that people are needing or wanting self-help as much as they want to be strengthened. It is useful, most definitely, but it leaves out the underworld, the deep inner life. Deep inner life," she emphasized. "It also leaves out the spirit." "I come from the Curanderisma healing tradition from Mexico and Central America. In this tradition a story is 'holy,' and it is used as medicine. The story is not told to lift you up, to make you feel better, or to entertain you, although all those things, of course, can be true. The story is meant to take the spirit into a descent to find something that is lost or missing and to bring it back to consciousness again. For some people that may sound mystical . . . and it is!" she added, laughing.⁵

Reading Leonardo Boff’s *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Chung Hyun Kyung’s *Struggle To Be The Sun Again*, Ivone Gebara’s *Longing for Running Water* and *Out of*

⁴Professor Kwok Pui Lan’s comments to me in the second reflection paper for T2160 Third World Feminist Theology, June 19, 2008.

⁵Clarissa Pinkola Esté, interview by Isabella Wylde, “Women Who Run with the Wolves,” *The Radiance* Winter 1994, <http://www.radiancemagazine.com/issues/1994/wolves.html> (accessed June 18, 2008).

the Depths and Aruna Gnanadason's *Listen to the Women!* as well as her essay "Toward a Feminist Eco-Theology for India" brought me back to the 1994 interview (excerpted above) with Clarissa Pinkola Estes on the importance of storytelling for all people and times. The stories that Chung, Gnanadason and Gebara tell are all sacred ones describing oppression and loss. They are also personal narratives of courageous women who are not afraid of pain and the "descent to find something that is lost or missing and to bring it back to consciousness again."⁶ Without the telling of stories of suffering, there can be no healing for women in the world. Indeed, without the telling of stories of suffering, there can be no healing for anything on the planet, including the earth itself.

In this chapter I will explore human (and non human) suffering through the writing of feminist theologians, beginning with Rosemary Radford Ruether and Sallie McFague. I cite an example of human suffering from Dutch Roman Catholic priest Henri Nouwen. Brazilian Ivone Gebara, Aruna Gnanadason of India, and Chung Hyun Kyung of Korea join the conversation. I will underscore the critical role that personal storytelling plays in the experience of suffering and loss, examining what may be recovered in bringing healing to ourselves and others. The concepts of conversion and redemption take on new meaning for twenty -first century Christians in the process of recovery and resistance to colonizing institutions and structures. Expansion of a theology of suffering and healing to include the earth is given by Aruna Gnanadason in her powerful piece, *Listen to the Women! Listen to the Earth*. This active listening is the next logical step to be taken in following the work and witness of liberation theologians Leonardo Boff and

⁶Ibid.

Ivone Gebara, who speak of the “earth as the new poor.”⁷ Earth-based, “green grace” particularly as Gnanadason contrasts “brown grace” with “red grace,” illustrates how Third World feminists re-connect with their native land and spiritual roots in their work for justice for oppressed women and nature. I will conclude this chapter with the example of the Christian celebration of the Eucharist as a model of transformation deeply rooted in gratitude.

Suffering and Resistance

Adverse conditions are our spiritual friends.”⁸

(God) has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, (God) has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degrees. (Luke 1:52)

Exploring the epistemology of suffering and loss may sound maudlin, but actually it is not! When we deny the reality of suffering, pain and loss in our personal lives and in the life of all life forms we increase suffering. By avoiding the grim realities of pain we experience and the pain we cause others, including pain to the earth, we increase our own suffering and that of others. We betray our feelings and thereby create more disconnection between what we feel and what we say. Denial of suffering also causes us to be fearful. Of course, ecological disasters like global warming are frightening in their magnitude, and lead to “ecological despair.” Sallie Fague identifies this phenomenon in her latest book, *A New Climate for Moral Theology* when she writes, “By ‘ecological despair,’ I mean the crushing sense of futility that comes over us the more we learn about

⁷ Aruna Gnanadason, *Listen to the Women!: Listen to the Earth!* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 88. Sallie McFague also identifies nature as the “new poor” in *The Body of God*, “Nature is the ‘new poor,’ and in an embodiment, organic perspective, this means bodily poverty,” 165.

⁸ Zheche Gyaltsab and Padma Gyurmed Mangya, *Path of Heroes: Birth of Enlightenment*: Volume 11, Translated by Deborah Black, (Oakland, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1995), 417.

the state of our world and its creatures. Global warming is raising ecological despair several notches.”⁹

In a recent article in the *Boston Globe*, Emily Anthes observes that at the Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne, Australia children are being diagnosed with psychosis or anxiety disorders focused on climate change, as others having nightmares about global-warming-related natural disasters.¹⁰ The antidote described by Paul Epstein, the associate director for the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School, is “banding together with other citizens to mitigate the effects of global warming. Taking action might not only give us back a sense of our own sense of efficacy against a powerful outside force, but also helps us build community and social ties that offset stress.”¹¹ “Getting involved can be an antidote to the depression that can come from the overwhelming realizations that we have to face . . . It can be empowering to realize that what you do is effective,”¹² observes Epstein.

The best way to approach suffering, particularly suffering caused by a lack of concern for future generations, is not to ignore the reality, but simply to begin where you are, to act. Begin on a small scale by paying attention, what Buddhist writers call practicing “mindfulness.”¹³ Rather than taking on the global environmental crisis, recount a personal story of loss and oppression; tell a story of how your local community has been affected by climate change. Pay attention first to the events your life which have

⁹Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2008), 157.

¹⁰Emily Anthes, “Climate Change takes a Mental Toll,” *The Boston Globe*, February 9, 2009.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³This topic will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 3.

brought hurt to others. As Sallie McFague writes in her seminal text, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, "Perhaps this is the way that we see the presence of God in the world and are nurtured and renewed by it - not through feelings of oceanic oneness with nature but by paying attention, listening to, learning about the specialness, the difference, the detail of the 'wonderful life' of which we are a part."¹⁴

Paying attention to the details and effect of global warming in one's personal life gives one courage to resist forces that have caused suffering and pain. Resistance can take many forms in our communities. Refuse to buy produce shipped round the world to one's big box supermarket. Shop and eat locally. Exchange all the light bulbs in your home with compact fluorescent light bulbs. Whenever possible, use renewable energy. Grow your own food. Plant trees. Support legislation that seeks to leverage US government actions for the benefit of vulnerable communities impacted by climate change. Members of the Vermont Interfaith Power & Light, a faith-based organization dedicated to addressing global warming, recently added their voices to the following protest,

On behalf of the millions of members of our development, faith-based, environmental, women's and other organizations, we are calling for Congressional action to address the serious impacts that climate change is creating for the world's poorest and most vulnerable, including a disproportionate number of women. It is time to put a "human face" on the climate crisis.

As the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently concluded, the poorest people, especially those in impoverished countries, will have the least capacity to cope with increasingly devastating impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events, sea-level rise, drought, disruption of water and food supplies, and impacts on health. Climate change is quickly becoming a

¹⁴McFague, *The Body of God*, 211.

major driver of poverty around the world while it undermines global stability and security, economic development and gender quality on a wide scale.¹⁵

As McFague describes this process of resistance, “What matters is the clarity of vision that comes from stepping out from the blinders that our consumer culture puts on us so that we begin to see differently.”¹⁶ Paying attention to the details in one's own suffering causes us to see differently and that has brought change to our story telling. Resistance always includes patience for people who are often threatened or fearful of changes to lifestyle. Institutions, such as the church, are slow to change, particularly when policies are steeped in decades and even centuries of models based on growth and accumulation of material goods.

Late twentieth and twenty-first century stories reflect failure to connect to the earth's stories in meaningful ways. This is because most Americans' epistemologies are not ones that readily incorporate relishing the beauty of nature and humanity's small place in the world. Noting the work of Passionist priest and cultural historian Thomas Berry, a disciple of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, McFague observes,

That most contemporary people do not have a story of the cosmos that on a daily basis helps them understand how they and other created beings fit into the scheme of things. The Genesis myth used to be such a working cosmology but is not longer helpful for most of us. The common creation story...is a narrative that all people on the earth can know about and affirm not only as their own story but the story of all other people and all other living creatures.¹⁷

This summer I witnessed a notable antidote to this failure to connect to the earth.

¹⁵Allies letter sent via email to VTIPL board members August 21, 2008.

¹⁶McFague, *The Body of God*, 157.

¹⁷Ibid., 70.

At the 2008 Diocese of Vermont's Summer Camp, located on Lake Champlain in Burlington Vermont, campers and staff alike sat around the campfire every night and told stories of creation, while praying and singing about the love of God. The theme of the summer camp was "Handle with Care." Organizers described the camp theme: "Campers will deepen their understanding of what it means to live in loving relationship with God, each other, and creation with an emphasis on how they can "handle with care their relationship with creation."¹⁸ Their stories included stories of the earth's suffering because of environmental abuse. At every meal, campers and counselors held a contest to see if they could produce a "no waste" meal, thereby underscoring their commitment to be mindful of every morsel of food they consumed. This is a change from any summer camp I knew as a child! This camp presented both the threats to the sustainability of creation and the small actions every person can take to reverse the trends toward environmental degradation. Campers at the Diocese of Vermont's 2008 camp actively demonstrated that suffering and oppression of creation by humans cannot be ignored. As McFague painfully acknowledges,

The universe has not been for most species, and certainly not for most individuals within the various species, a 'gorgeous celebratory event.' It has been a story of struggle, loss and often early death. To see the universe and especially our planet as 'the primary mode of the divine presence,' as Berry does, is to claim implicitly an optimistic arrow in the evolutionary story, a position that Berry's mentor, Teilhard deChardin, embraced but that few if any scientists are willing to allow.¹⁹

¹⁸<http://www.dioceseofvermont.org/RockPoint/RPSummer08/2008%20RPSC%20Brochure.pdf> (accessed May 9, 2008).

¹⁹McFague, *Body of God*, 71.

McFague contends that creation spirituality's ungrounded optimism, based in part on its reading of evolutionary history but also on an illumination model of how human beings change: "to know the good is to do the good" is not enough.²⁰ As Paul reminds us,

"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate....For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is not longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me." (Romans 7: 15, 17-18a).

We need to "come clean" and tell our stories of suffering, both the pain and suffering we have experienced as well as the pain and suffering we have inflicted on others, thereby preventing others from thriving in a way for which they, and we, were intended to flourish from our birth. Leonardo Boff provides one example of how to "come clean" in telling a story from his beloved native Brazil.

In his book, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* Leonardo Boff seeks to "connect the cry of the oppressed with the cry of the earth."²¹ Or, as Boff states more emphatically at the beginning of chapter 5,

Liberation theology and ecological discourse have something in common: they start from two bleeding wounds. The wound of poverty breaks the social fabric of millions and millions of poor people around the world. The other wound, systematic assault on the earth, breaks down the balance of the planet, which is under threat from the plundering of development as practiced by contemporary global societies. Both lines of reflection and practice have as their starting point a cry: the cry of the poor for life, freedom, and beauty...and the cry of the Earth groaning under oppression.²²

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll ,NY: Orbis Books, 1997), Intro, xi.

²²Ibid., 104.

Boff is riveting when he describes the threatened Amazon of his native Brazil, the case study of chapter 4. Boff traces the economic and spiritual ties that bind the fate of the rain forests with the fates of the Indians and the poor of the land. For Boff, the Brazilian Amazon is “where all the capital sins (mortal sins and sins of capital) are committed.”²³ He persuasively demonstrates how liberation theology must join with ecology in reclaiming the dignity of the earth and our sense of community. The church is critical in this resistance. “In this entire resistance struggle, indigenous peoples and small farmers have had a crucial ally, the churches committed to the poor and to liberation.”²⁴ Resistance and suffering are also central to the epistemological methodology employed by Chung and Gebara and find a point of synergy with the writing of Dutch Roman Catholic Henri Nouwen.

In the classic text written primarily for clergy, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen writes,

“Making one's own wounds a course of healing, therefore, does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains but for a constant willingness to see one's own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all men share.”²⁵

Echoing Nouwen's wisdom, Chung states emphatically “to be human is to suffer and resist.”²⁶ Nouwen reminds us that “A Christian community is...a healing community not

²³Ibid., 86.

²⁴Ibid., 100.

²⁵Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1972), 90.

²⁶Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle To Be The Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 39.

because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision.”²⁷

Chung recounts stories of her own pain and resistance as a means to arrive at a new vision:

“Pain and suffering...are the epistemological starting point for Asian women in their search for the meaning of full humanity. The Asian woman knows the depth of humanity and the aching hearts of other women because she has suffered and she has lived in pain.”²⁸

Here is where Chung makes a clear distinction as a feminist theologian. For Chung, epistemology is an “epistemology from the broken body, a broken body longing for healing and wholeness.”²⁹ Suffering is “the major element” of Asian women’s experiences.”³⁰ For Chung, suffering and oppression of Asian women are caused by a collective sin of the oppressors’ greed and desire to dominate.³¹ The identification of Jesus in his suffering gives Asian women that vision, the “seed for liberation” if handled with care and not understood as a reason for oppression.³²

Relational identification, rather than biological identification, is how Chung redefines the Virgin Mary as a self-defining woman and not as an example of historical patriarchal oppression.³³ Chung’s delineation of the Virgin Mary not as a puppet of Western patriarchalism but as “a complete being within herself”³⁴ gives twenty-first century feminists an example of how a longstanding teaching that has sought to negate

²⁷Nouwen, 96.

²⁸Chung, 39.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., 40.

³²Chung, 54.

³³Ibid., 77.

³⁴Ibid.

the role of women is given fresh voice through the lenses of an Asian feminist theology. For Chung, the celebration of the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15) takes on a whole new meaning to Mary's saying "Yes" to bearing God's son. For Christians in the First World, the question becomes, where does obedience to God take us today? Are we as bold as young Mary in addressing the poor of our own communities, as unfettered as Mary was to resisting the social expectations and norms of her own day when she boldly proclaimed in her song, "(God) has shown scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, (God) has put down the might from their thrones, and exalted those of low degrees?" (Luke 1:52)

Obedience to her vows as a nun living among the poor in her native country inevitably leads Ivone Gebara to explore the meaning of suffering and its connection to evil. In her book, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*, Gebara demonstrates insight and deep courage when she muses in highly provocative language,

Sometimes I think of evil as though it were leaven in dough, hence the difficulty of separating it from the whole. Some Gospel passages suggest to me the presence of evil as keenly as they suggest the presence of good, and this urges me to new parts of reflection and action... Sometimes I have the impression that justice consists of isolated acts that contain the least evil.³⁵

Gebara's chilling words cause me to ask myself, "Why do I do the things I do?" and "What is my motivation in doing good?" Gebara's candor urges critical self-examination

³⁵Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Suffering* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 56.

when she describes evil in embodiment language. “In my body, my thought, and my prayer I live in this reality I call ‘the transcendence and immanence of evil.’”³⁶

How often are we honest enough to admit, as Gebara does here, that “The good we do is often motivated by the affliction and destruction around us. Good is the name for that fragile reality that produces a certain sense of well-being, a certain situation that we call justice, a certain temporary happiness.”³⁷ Do we try too hard and too fast to find easy fixes to alleviate the suffering of others, because it makes us feel good, or feel as though we are making a difference in the world? What do we do with our own suffering and that of all beings, with whom we are connected in this biosphere? Nouwen addresses this phenomenon among clergy attempting to save others from suffering:

Perhaps the main task of the minister is to prevent people from suffering for the wrong reasons...No minister can save anyone. He can only offer himself as a guide to fearful people. Yet paradoxically, it is precisely in this guidance that the first signs of hope become visible. This is so because a shared pain is no longer paralyzing but mobilizing, when understood as a way to liberation. When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains, but that we can mobilize them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope.³⁸

When we have critically examined the role we play in the suffering of others along with what we do with our own suffering, then we have begun to plant the seeds for real transformation and growth in our spiritual lives and in our communities. Boff, Gebara and Chung demonstrate such “planting” through their personal narratives, all the while expanding a Christian theology of suffering and healing. Gebara and Chung are

³⁶Ibid., 57.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Nouwen, 95.

cantadoras, keepers of stories that recount women's struggles and desires to alleviate suffering through brutal story telling. However, suffering is not an end in itself. It is the way to transformation and healing lives that have been broken, including the life of the planet. Confronting suffering through story telling is the way to begin our work of compassion in the world. True freedom comes only when we dare to tell our stories.

Recovering, Reconnecting and Conversion

Compassion that knows beings in all levels of their suffering motivates service for them on all levels of their need. Such service is not easily discouraged or disappointed in temporary outcomes, because it holds others in their deepest potential of freedom, which is always present.³⁹

Remembering past actions develops compassion, prompting change in attitude and behavior. Limits are placed on human activity so that all may flourish. The decisions and limits we make today about the cars we drive, the food we eat, the places in which we dwell and the amount of energy and fossil fuels we consume, have a direct effect upon what others will be able to do tomorrow. As Rosemary Radford Ruether writes in her groundbreaking, *Gaia and God*,

The life force itself is not unequivocally good, but becomes 'evil' when it is maximized at the expense of others. In this sense 'good' lies in limits, a balancing of our own drive for life with the life drives of all the others in which we are in community, so that the whole remains in life-sustaining harmony. The wisdom of nature lies in the development of built-in limits through a diversity of beings in interrelation, so that none outruns its own 'niche.'⁴⁰

Human beings, particularly in First World countries, have outrun their own niche. We are out of balance. The carbon footprint, a tool being used increasingly as a means to

³⁹Gyaltsab, 178.

⁴⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 256-257.

measure an individual's and community's or organization's demands on the natural environment and consumption of natural resources, particularly in comparison to the use of these limited resources in developing nations, is one practical exercise to illustrate just how off kilter we really are.⁴¹

Sunday of Labor Day weekend 2008, designated by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the United States as Katrina Remembrance Sunday, reminded Episcopalians of the destruction of communities due to increased frequency and volatility of storms, brought about by climate change and increased industrialization. Hurricane Katrina had its greatest impact on communities living at greatest economic risk. As noted in the Worldwatch Publication, *Inspiring Progress: Religions' Contributions to Sustainable Development*,

Wetlands act as catchments for excess rainfall, preventing floods or reducing their severity. Indeed, ecologists assert that the fundamental infrastructure failure of the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster was not crumbling levees, but the loss of buffering wetlands decades earlier that were sacrificed to urban expansion.⁴²

Hurricane Katrina, the costliest Atlantic hurricane ever, caused an estimated \$81.2 billion in damages and claimed more than 1800 lives between August 23 and 30, 2005. Since then, thousands of relief workers have volunteered countless hours to assist survivors throughout the Gulf Coast regions of Louisiana and Mississippi.⁴³

⁴¹ Cf. www.ecofootprint.org.

⁴² Matthew Waite and Craig Pittman, "Katrina Offers Lesson on Wetlands Protection," *St. Petersburg Times*, 5 September 2005, in *Inspiring Progress: Religions' Contributions to Sustainable Development*, Gary T. Gardner (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 60.

⁴³ www.episcopallifeonline (accessed August 24, 2008).

The devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina illustrates Michael Northcott's description of the carbon footprint as a way of remembering people lost to climate change:

The quantity of carbon now in the oceans and atmosphere is a physical footprint, a living memorial, to the industrial revolution and its many victims. These victims include the peoples and other creatures who lived and live in on or on the terrestrial and subterranean forests which are being burned to sustain the fossil-fuelled era...They include destroyed agrarian communities, lost topsoil, extinct species, wrecked ecosystems. They include flood and drought victims, and those who die, and will die, trying to escape from climate-stressed continents and inundated islands. The carbon cycle is earth's way of remembering all of these people.⁴⁴

Like the carbon footprint, Katrina Remembrance Sunday was a way of remembering and measuring what environmental damage has been done and what work there is yet to do to re-connect to critical, life flourishing relationships.

Michael Northcott reminds us of using the word Gaia to describe critical relationships as we recover the inextricable link of the human household with all creation.

This recovery takes the form of James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis which, like sacred cosmology, describes the world not as a mechanism but as a fine-balanced relational nexus of life forms. In the Gaia hypothesis Lovelock was the first to propose what climate scientists now take for granted, which is that all of life is connected by the carbon cycle and involved in maintaining proportions of gases and chemicals in the earth's rocks, soils, waters and atmosphere which constitute a planet capable of sustaining life.⁴⁵

Gaia theory can take the form of storytelling. While what has been lost through environmental degradation, including extinct animal species, may never be recovered, the

⁴⁴Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 268.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 69.

story of anthropogenic climate change is also a wake up call to people and communities willing to resist companies and institutions that oppress the earth and all its inhabitants. Change involves resistance for the sake of healing of the planet and its inhabitants. Without change in behavior, beginning with repentance and seeking of absolution for past sins, remembering seems shallow.

A collective repentance will re-connect humans from estrangement with one another and all living forms on the planet. Repentance and a commitment to changing one's attitude and behavior towards one's treatment of others can be developed by recovering an ecological spirituality, what Ruether describes as redeveloping the "right brain" or "intuitive part of our experience and culture atrophied by masculine dominance. This means attention to the arts and liturgy, dance and bodywork, to reawaken our deadened capacities for holistic experience."⁴⁶ This ecological spirituality is found in spiritual communities who recall through word and deed the descent of the spirit "to find something that is lost or missing and to bring it back to consciousness again."⁴⁷

McFague concludes *A Moral Climate* with a powerful call to conversion, recalling the second story of Creation in which human beings are made "in the image of God" (Gen 1:26) and called to tend God's world (Genesis 1:28) not destroy it with "reckless, selfish, out-of-control consumerism."⁴⁸

If we ever thought ourselves in charge of the earth, capable of 'managing' the planet we know that we have failed utterly. We must undergo the deepest of all conversions, the conversion from egocentrism to theocentrism, a conversion to what we truly are: reflections of God, as is

⁴⁶Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 241-242.

⁴⁷Clarissa Pinkola Esté, interview by Isabella Wylde, "Women Who Run with the Wolves," *The Radiance* Winter 1994, <http://www.radiancemagazine.com/issues/1994/wolves.html> (accessed June 18, 2008).

⁴⁸McFague, *A New Climate*, 161.

everything in creation. The only difference between us and the rest of creation is that the others reflect God, tell of God, simply by being, whereas we must will that it be so. We must desire to be what we truly are - made in the image of God, and thus able to live justly and sustainably with all other creatures.⁴⁹

In language reminiscent of 12 step recovery programs, McFague underscores how the human ego gets in the way of transformation. Transformation can only occur when the self lets go of her own agenda to control resisting imperialist and colonizing tendencies to dominate production for the sake her own fancies. For example,

We must recognize the ways in which the devastation of the earth is an integral part of an appropriation of the goods of the earth whereby a wealthy minority can enjoy strawberries in winter, winged to their glittering supermarkets by a global food procurement system, while those who pick and packed the strawberries lack the money for bread and are dying from pesticide poisoning.⁵⁰

In the Western world's model of competition, such conversion can be viewed negatively as abdication. According to Jesus, it is only when a person loses the old self and the need to dominate others that one can know God's grace. In allowing the old self to die, a new self is recovered in relationship to God and one another (Matthew 16:25). Loss and recovery in God, whose body is the whole universe⁵¹ is at the heart of the doctrine of grace.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 5.

⁵¹ The body of God as the universe is a critical theme in McFague's book, *The Body of God*.

Transformation and Grace

“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)

In the Western church throughout the centuries the theological concept of grace has generally been understood as an act of favor initiated by the supreme being, God, for the salvation of humanity, regardless of one's deeds, earned worth or innate goodness. Grace has also been understood as being indispensable for salvation. Human beings are not capable of salvation on their own. Salvation is a free gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9). Simply put, human beings are saved by God's unconditional love and power, not by anything we do or are, apart from God. This understanding of grace seemed sufficient, or at least acceptable, in the Western church, until liberation theologians began to focus on God's particular preference for those marginalized by society's colonizing Western church. As Elsa Tamez, a Mexico/Costa Rica feminist theologian describes,

God makes this choice not in order to exclude some people, but precisely in order to negate exclusion by including all people beginning with those presently excluded. God's preferential option is to begin with the excluded who cry out to God in their abandonment – who know they are excluded and who demand from the God of life the end of God's absence⁵².

How do Northern ecofeminists, in the words of Ruether, take hold of "this historical cultural connection of women and nature as a positive relation by which women can stand in solidarity with exploited nature, resist the violence done to nature and to themselves, and become healers of nature?"⁵³ Aruna Gnanadason employs the

⁵²Elsa Tamez, *The Amnesty of Grace*, 132-133 as quoted in Aruna Gnanadason, *Listen to the Women!*, : *Listen to the Earth!*, 87.

⁵³Ruether, *Women Healing Earth*, 3-4.

reinterpreted language of grace as a way to re-connect oppressed Third World women to nature.

Gnanadason describes the challenge “to reinterpret grace to have meaning for us today in our world where we are dis-graced by the way we have lived with the earth.”⁵⁴ This earth-based “green grace” always includes resistance, transformation and gratitude.⁵⁵ “Green grace” expands our own ability to understand suffering by beginning with the wisdom of the earth and expanding to our personal narrative. Experiencing the suffering of the earth reminds us of the pain we have caused one another through our own greed and lack of concern for those who have gone before as well as for those who will come after us on this planet. “Red grace,” a term used by Jay McDaniels in the essay “The Sacred Whole: An Ecumenical Protestant Approach,”⁵⁶ refers to the blood of Christ – a reminder that God loves us in spite of the greed we have inflicted on the planet. McDaniels reminds us that “only when we can own our shadows can we become healers in a broken world.”⁵⁷

In the current context, our shadows include the idolatry of serving endless growth. Part of our self-awareness and our repentance must lie in finding the God of endless growth within ourselves and re-channeling his creative energies, not for exploiting others but rather for purposes of earth healing.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Aruna Gnanadason, *Listen to the Women!: Listen to the Earth!*, 89.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁶ Jay McDaniels, “The Sacred Whole: An Ecumenical Protestant Approach,” in *The Greening of Faith: God, the Environment and the Good Life*, eds., John E Carroll, Paul Brockelman and Mary Westfall (London: University Press of New England, 1997, 114), as quoted in Aruna Gnanadason, *Listen to the Women! : Listen to the Earth*, 92.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The “God of endless growth within ourselves”⁵⁹ is a lenses through which to view Gnanadason’s new category of “brown grace,” “the traditions of prudent care, i.e, of the people who live in closest proximity to the earth and who give to the land its integrity.”⁶⁰ Re-connecting to the traditions of prudent care is an antidote to suffering. It is also an example of how to give thanks for the gifts of the earth. This gratitude comes as part of the transformation brought about by conversion in behavior.

Giving thanks to God at every opportunity shifts the balance from a place of pain to a reminder - do not underestimate the things in nature that give great joy and pleasure. Let us mark these events, places and things of beauty and allow them to touch our suffering hearts and striving souls. These events and beings that give us deep joy need to be imprinted in our memories and called to mind when challenges strike. The wonder of such noticing and giving thanks - every day - is that we become more easily touched by the little things. Gratitude on a small scale widens our heart to make connections on a large scale. We realize that we are connected not only to what is with us now, but to our spiritual ancestors, those in our communities who struggled before us and because of whom we are able to tell our own stories. Creating space in our hearts for such warmth and gratitude enables suffering, when it occurs, not to undo us.⁶¹

The celebration of the Lord's Supper, the principal worship service in Episcopal Churches on Sunday mornings, is arguably the most powerful example of community

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Gnanadason, 95.

⁶¹For this teaching, I am indebted to the writing of Tibetan Buddhist nun Pema Chodron, particularly in her audio disc, *Don't Bite the Hook*, disc 1, verse 9.

building created through a common story of remembrance of suffering and thanksgiving. The preferred title of “Eucharist” means “Thanksgiving,” and the main portion of the service centers around the “Prayer of Great Thanksgiving.” While much current debate exists as to the doctrine of atonement and its relevance for twenty-first century Christians, for the topics of transformation and grace, I underscore the symbolism of a meal remembering Jesus’ welcoming all to the table, and his unfettered embrace of those most marginalized by society’s constraints, those most impoverished by other’s freedom and materialism. How might our meals of remembrance each Sunday morning provide examples, even models, for how to live more simply so that others may simply live? How might the Eucharist be a way to show a community that its local church remembers those who suffer and are actively resisting further oppression by addressing systems and behaviors that continue to impede life flourishing? In its weekly reenactment, the Christian celebration of the Holy Eucharist is one of the most powerful examples of a community being created and upheld through a story of remembrance. Storytelling creates vitality and growth.

Acknowledging suffering and pain is painstaking in its thoroughness and relentlessness. But suffering is not an end in itself. It is the way to transformation and healing for lives that have been broken, including the life of the planet. It is the way to begin our work of compassion in the world. It is probably the only way to begin to undertake healing in the world, telling one story of suffering at a time. Can we embrace suffering as a guest in our home, and even give thanks for this uninvited visitor,⁶²

⁶²A poem by Persian poet Rumi in Jack Kornfield, xi.

knowing that suffering will take us to a deep place of healing, wholeness and wellness?

True freedom, joy and peace come only when we dare to tell our stories of suffering.

CHAPTER THREE

Turning the Wheel: Suffering As the Key to Developing an Environmental Ethic

In the previous chapter, I explored the epistemology of suffering not only as a critical narrative for the Third World feminist theologians, Ivone Gebara, Chung Hyun Kyung and Aruna Gnanadason, but also as a story for all people and life forms on the planet earth. Third World ecofeminist theologians embrace the mystery of suffering and pain of oppression in order to unveil a deep place of healing, wholeness and wellness. This chapter steps back to an older narrative than that of Third World feminist theologians, to the one who is perhaps best known for an epistemology of suffering, Indian Siddhartha Gautama of the Sakya clan.

The novel *Siddhartha* by the German Herman Hesse, was a favorite book of mine in high school. Later, in teaching an introduction to world religions, I used the little novel *Siddhartha* as a way to look at the beginning of Buddhism in India. The struggles of the young prince Siddhartha, particularly in his desire to understand the reality of suffering, struck very deep chords in my high school students. I realized that Siddhartha's tale not only was about an ancient Indian prince deserting material wealth and adopting a simpler life style that transcended the immediate world of success, power and prestige; Siddhartha's narrative was also the universal story of a young adult seeking to find meaning in the midst of suffering and despair. Ultimately, Siddhartha's lesson was not to shun suffering but to embrace it and welcome it and then to be free of suffering.

So, in homage to this Buddha, I look first at Siddhartha's narrative and the early development of Buddhist teachings and practice. I include the central role of meditation

in the development of an environmental ethic. Then, influenced by contemporary Buddhist voices of Stephanie Kaza, Rita Gross and Pema Chodron, I turn to the work of Joanna Macy and the writing of Thich Nhat Hanh in the development of an environmental ethic for the twenty-first century pilgrim.

Siddhartha's Narrative of Suffering

Why may Buddhism be the best religion to address the suffering of the planet? Buddhism is the religion most associated with suffering. Certainly Christianity's narrative of the Crucifixion is a story of intense suffering, and, for many, redemptive suffering. Buddha's story of the contemplation of suffering and development of "co-dependent arising" is quite distinct from anything I ever encountered in the church. Like Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy, I too have been deeply inspired by the Buddha's teaching of co-dependent arising, or dependent co-arising. Macy describes this central teaching of the Buddha: "He taught the dependent co-arising of all things, how they continually change and condition each other in interconnections as real as the spokes in a wheel."¹ She continues, "I have been deeply inspired by the Buddha's teaching of dependent co-arising. It fills me with a sense of connection and mutual responsibility with all beings. Helping me understand the non-hierarchical and self-organizing nature of life. It is the philosophic grounding of all my work."²

I believe that much of the appeal among Episcopal clergy of Buddhist practice of meditation on suffering addresses the reality of suffering church authorities have tended

¹ Macy, Joanna, "Dependent Co-Arising," <http://www.joannamacy.net/html/engaged.html> (accessed February 5, 2009).

to ignore for much of the history of the Western church, or have not known exactly how to address. How does suffering lead to awakening and, once awakened, how do we re-connect to the relationships vital for life to flourish? This is the key question that Siddhartha explored in his life. Buddhists have been addressing for centuries the same basic question of how suffering leads to awakening, and now Christians are listening. Additionally, the appeal of a non dualistic, non hierarchical, non patriarchal model in a religious tradition, in harmony with all things, does not contradict the teachings of Jesus. In the words of Buddhist scholar and teacher, Ken McLeod, “Buddhism is more a set of tools for waking up to our original nature than a system of beliefs. For this reason, many of its tools are used by adherents of other religious traditions.”³

Siddhartha's biography begins with a familiar story of growing up with privilege. He was born Siddhartha Gautama, probably in the year 563 BCE, a contemporary of Thagoras. His father was the ruler of a province in the kingdom of Kosala, homeland of the Sakya people in the plains of northeastern India. Siddhartha was shielded from the realities of life by well-meaning if not overly- protective parents, but according to the laws of karma, no one can escape one's density. His worldview was one of entitlement, and yet Siddhartha, according to the mythology, had two fates before him: to live the life of a wealthy prince, the tradition in which his father of the Brahman caste

²Ibid.

³ Ken McLeod, *Wake Up To Your Life: Discovering the Buddhist Path of Attention* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 18. Christian feminist Rosemary Ruether and Buddhist feminist Rita Gross hold an intensive and extensive conversation about the role of suffering and other key topics in *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*.

was raised, or to be a savior. One day, as the legend goes, the young prince's chariot driver went down the wrong road, and Siddhartha saw suffering for the first time. In what is known as the "four sights," Siddhartha's illusions about life were quickly shattered when he saw illness, old age and death. Then Siddhartha saw a religious mendicant who was totally at peace and present with himself. Siddhartha's life changed with that fourth sight. He woke up. He left his wife and young son and sought to discover that peace, to develop that awareness of life he saw in the begging man.

Siddhartha the pilgrim went searching for the mystery of life, the reasons for suffering, and how to achieve the peace he saw in the fourth sight. For five years he sought truth. And then, in a forest at Buddha Gaya at the age of 35, he sat down on a grass mat under a tree, he grasped the four sacred truths of the way to enlightenment. He had resolved not to move until he observed the nature of enlightenment and attained freedom from suffering. Later, in a sermon at a deer park near Banaras, he revealed the truth to the former companions who had left him when he gave up his asceticism. These Four Noble Truths are based on a simple problem-solving model, the model rooted in Indian philosophy and medicine: What is the problem? What is the root of the problem? Is there a solution? How do you put the solution into effect?⁴ These four probing questions are as relevant to the development of an environmental ethic today as they were to Siddhartha in his search for enlightenment. For Siddhartha, the answers were quite clear. His discourse in the deer park, "The Turning of the Wheel of Dharma," began a forty- five year teaching not on Buddhism (that term would not be used until five

hundred years after his death) but on Dharma, instruction as expressed in the wisdom of the Four Noble Truths and subsequent teachings . The Dharma is understood as “the way.”

The first noble truth is the reality of suffering: it exists. Suffering is the central reality of the human experience. It is any sort of discomfort, real or imagined, large or small, that we would rather not experience. When we experience such discomfort, our first impulse is to put an end to it, to stop it at any cost. In essence, we are trying to separate ourselves from the pain, and thus from the reality. The first noble truth tells us that we cannot deny the reality of suffering, though many things present themselves in twenty-first century America to do just that. The Buddha taught that suffering arises in three ways: from pain, from change, and from life itself.

The root of suffering is *dukkha*. Dukkha is translated many ways. I have come to best understand it as where I get stuck in my emotions or reactions to people, places and things. The three fundamental emotional reactions to experience are attraction, aversion, and dullness or indifference. In each case, “the emotional reaction separates us from what we are actually experiencing;”⁵ we are stuck in our reactions. We perpetuate this stuckness by creating patterns of emotions and behaviors around our reactions. The formation of patterns and their role in shaping what we experience is called *karma*. Karma is thought and action, triggered negativity that is both mental and verbal. All this thought strengthens in the mind the tendency to feel unhappy; harmful karma makes it

⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁵ Ibid., 25.

harder to wake up. Positive karma empowers the mind to wake up. As Macy writes in *World as Lover, World as Self*, "The effect of our behavior is inescapable, not because God watches and tallies, or an angel marks our acts in a ledger, but our acts co-determine what we become" ⁶ and when we react to phenomenon, we make more karma.

The third noble truth states emphatically that YES! there is a way to end suffering. In Buddhism, the basis for suffering is the false sense of a separate self and, "When the conditioning that underlies the sense of separation, the false duality of subject and object, is dismantled, suffering ceases." ⁷ We cannot and do not end pain; but we can end the suffering that has accompanied our pain. It's that simple an answer, and that difficult a behavior to enact. Attention, "the ability to experience what arises without falling into the conditioned reactions that cause suffering" ⁸ is the key to getting our pain out of our suffering. Attention is always present, but we are so conditioned by our reactive habits that we need to cultivate the awareness of non duality. By entering the path of non duality, we encounter the way of life that leads to freedom from suffering and the reoccurring patterns that cause suffering. "What the Buddha woke up to under the Bodhi tree was the *paticca samupadda*, the dependent co-arising of phenomena, in which you cannot isolate a separate, continuous self." ⁹ The solution to our suffering, and that of the rest of the world's, is put into effect when we follow the Eight Fold path and the three disciplines.

⁶Macy, Joanna. *World as Lover, World as Self : Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2007, 88.

⁷McLeod, 27.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Macy, *Lover*, 189.

In the classic *What the Buddha Taught*, Walpola Rahula describes in succinct terms the essence of the Middle or Eight Fold Path, “which gives vision and knowledge.”¹⁰ Grouping the eight factors of the path into three categories, ethical conduct (*sila*), mental discipline (*Samadhi*) and wisdom (*panna*), Rahula offers a primer for how to approach a Buddhist environmental ethic. In *Wake Up to Your Life*, McLeod offers a more extended and contemporary primer than Rahula's. Right speech, right action and right livelihood fall into the first category of morality. Right effort, right mindfulness and right attention fall into the second grouping of meditation. Right cognition and right view make up the third category of understanding. Morality, meditation and understanding are all closely connected. Religious traditions, such as Western Protestantism, begin with morality, and have heavily influenced the development and writing of codes and laws in the United States. In the Buddhist model, as meditation practice develops, understanding unfolds.¹¹

In my practice with John Makransky and in creating a diocesan Committee on the Environment, I have found the best place to begin is with the meditation itself. As outlined in *Awakening Through Love*, Makransky introduces novices to the Tibetan meditation by simply beginning with meditation on one's spiritual ancestors, imagined or real.¹² This epistemological approach to developing awareness and compassion leads directly to a clearer understanding of who we are and how we are all connected through

¹⁰Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Bedford, Eng.: G. Fraser, 1959), 45.

¹¹ McLeod, 30-31.

¹² Makransky, John and Philip Osgood, *Awakening Through Love: Unveiling Your Deepest Goodness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007).

our pain. Following the model that McLeod uses with his students and John Makranksy also uses with his students at Boston College, attention in meditation leads to understanding the actual effects of one's views on another. Then one is capable of changing one's behavior when acting on this right cognition and not from conditioned patterns. The question is, Can we stop clinging to these conditioned patterns and really make change in our lives? It takes courage to leave such conditioning behind. What further patterns and teachings might have to be undone, changed, or expanded in the development of an environmental ethic? Spiritual practice is key.¹³

The Development of the Practice

"The wheel of dharma turned again with the advent of Mahayana Buddhism."¹⁴

Growing up in the Episcopal Church, I learned about the foundational "three-legged stool" of scripture, tradition and reason as a way to describe the Anglican ethos. In my young mind trained in thinking in formulaic ways, the image of a stool (as opposed to a table or chair with four legs) was an appealing picture of something perfectly balanced.

Richard Hooker writes in the fifth volume of *The Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*,

What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason over-rule all other inferior judgments whatsoever.¹⁵

¹³ More will be said about meditation and spiritual practices in the final chapter.

¹⁴ Macy, *Lover*, 106.

¹⁵ Richard Hooker, *Laws*, Book V, 8:2; Folger Edition 2:39, 8-14.

Here Hooker describes a dynamic relationship— not competing, but still very hierarchical - among scripture, reason, and tradition. Just as scripture, tradition and reason are integral and balanced with one to another in traditional Anglican theology

Buddhism's three jewels of Dharma, Sangha and Buddha (refuge) are also integral to one another. There is a fluidity in these three jewels that is unlike the static structures I understood as “scripture, tradition and reason.” Since studying Buddhism, I have come to view all constructions in the church- doctrinal and liturgical - not as independent sources of revelation, but as integrally related to one another in one's spiritual practices.¹⁶ The teaching of *pattica samuppada* has caused me to see how connected all concepts really are. Separating Scripture from tradition and reason is like trying to take the Buddha out of dharma and sangha. All three are needed and essential for the whole.

"I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma; I take refuge in the Sangha" is a prayer repeated daily by Buddhists around the world. These three jewels are gentle reminders of the critical role of teaching, community and emptiness - all three - in developing Buddhature. The eight spoke wheel that is behind so many structures of the Buddha and that graces Buddhist gateways and temples symbolizes the teaching of the Buddha. The Dharma Chakra represents the central teaching of the Buddha, a teaching that Professor Don Swearer of Harvard Divinity School abbreviated as "ps" short for *pattica samuppada*, the dependent co-arising of all phenomena.¹⁷ *Pattica samuppada* is fundamental to understanding the greatest gift Buddhism has to contribute

¹⁶ I will explore liturgical practices of integration in the Christian tradition in chapter 4.

¹⁷ Don Swearer, “Buddhism and Ecology,” Harvard Divinity School, February 13, 2007.

to an environmental ethic: all things are connected. Also central to the dharma is the teaching of *anatman*, no permanent abiding self. The jewel of the dharma not only represents these fundamental principles of impermanence and causal effects of all beings, dharma also fundamentally attaches to the jewels of sangha and refuge. The sangha reminds us that individualistic as our efforts may be, we are all connected by our intentions to alleviate suffering and to develop compassion, *bodhichitta*. Thirdly, “to take refuge in the Buddha means that we take refuge in the possibility of presence, being free from the turmoil of reactive patterns.”¹⁸

During the second era of Buddhism, the Second Turning of the Wheel, at the beginning of the Mahayana Tradition, the key teaching of emptiness emerges.

The essence of all of the Buddha's teachings is emptiness, or interdependent arising. Nothing arises, dwells, or ceases independently. Therefore, there's nothing permanent. There is no true existing self. Everything that we think exists, or does not exist, or both or neither - all these things are fabrications of our mind. We fabricate them and then we become attached to our fabrications. We think they are real, which is why they are referred to as extreme. Basically, every single conception or clinging that we have is some kind of fanatical process. The Mahayana sutras teach emptiness, or *shunyata*, to lead us beyond all these extremes and fabrications.¹⁹

The other central teaching, according to Makransky, in the development of the Mahayana tradition is compassion, which empowers the mind for wisdom. “The Wisdom of emptiness and the compassion function in a dialectic synergy to create the path of the Bodhisattva.”²⁰

¹⁸McLeod, 45.

¹⁹Rinpoche, Dzongsar Khyentse. "Spotless from the Start," *Buddhadharma* Winter 2008, 23.

²⁰John Makransky, September 13, 2007.

The model practitioner of the Buddha's teachings also arises during the Second Turning. He (and now also she) is the *bodhisattva*, an enlightened soul who could cease existing but who chooses to continue to live in this world in order to use the store of merit gained by virtuous lives to help others on the path to enlightenment.

There are three principal codes of conduct or morality in the Buddhist tradition: the individual-freedom code (Sanskrit: *pratimoksha*), the awakening -being code *bodhisattva*, and the direct-awareness code (*vidyadhara*). The individual-freedom code is concerned primarily with actions that cause harm to others. The awakening-being code is aimed at waking us up to the groundlessness of all experience,²¹ and is the focus of my training with John Makransky. The awakening-being code is less concerned with specific actions and more concerned with embracing compassion and emptiness. "Without compassion, we are unable to open to the totality of experience. Without emptiness, we can't be free of habituated patterns." ²² The *bodhisattva* uses meditation to cultivate attention and awareness. Recalling one's spiritual benefactors and meditating on suffering of others and self are all key practices in the Tibetan tradition of *mahamudra* and *dzogchen*, which are designed specifically to develop compassion towards all beings.²³ By cultivating one's *bodhichitta*, including through the practice of *tonglen*,²⁴ the *bodhisattva* increases one's capacity to love and increases Buddhanature, the nature and capacity everyone has of being a Buddha, full of uninterrupted wisdom and compassion.

²¹ McLeod, 33.

²² Ibid.

²³ John Makransky, "Buddhist Meditation Theory: Tibet," Boston College, Fall 2007.

²⁴ The taking in of another's suffering and pain and the giving out of joy.

The Wheel Turns Again

In her naming the “Third Turning of the Wheel,” Joanna Macy urges that “The cognitive shifts and spiritual openings taking place in our own time can be seen as the Third Turning of the Wheel, that is as dramatic re-emergence of the Dharma of dependent co-arising”²⁵ in our own day and time. This work is non hierarchal and self-organizing in nature, and “a fresh reappropriation of the Buddha's central teaching.”²⁶ As Macy prophetically writes about this Third Turning of the Wheel, “This seems to be occurring today. Along with the destructive, even suicidal nature of many of our public policies, social and intellectual developments are converging now to bring into bold relief the Buddha's teaching of dependent co-arising--and the wheel of the Dharma turns again.”²⁷

At this critical juncture, when our world most needs to hear it, when articles in the *Wall Street Journal* are entitled, “Greed is Good,”²⁸ when industrial-military power and institutionalized greed conspire to destroy our world, the Third Turning of the Wheel bids us to seek another way, a more compassionate path than the one that is threatening to destroy the entire world economy and can alter our identity. Macy describes this turning in her tribute to Thomas Berry:

²⁵ Macy, *Lover*, 238 - 239.

²⁶ Macy, Joanna. “Dependent Co-Arising,” <http://www.joannamacy.net/html/engaged.html> (accessed February 5, 2009).

²⁷ *bid.*

²⁸ Smith, Roy C. “Greed Is Good: Wall Street bonuses are getting a bad rap, but they’re an important and useful part of the financial services industry. Taking them away could hamper the economic comeback,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 7 - 8, 2009.

In this turning the truth of our mutual belonging in the living body of Earth comes framed in fresh language of scientific discoveries, cosmological insights, and resurgent indigenous traditions. In people of all faiths and none, there is an urgency to taste and know this relatedness and break down the dichotomies between self and world, mind and nature, contemplation and action. The survival of conscious life seems to depend on our doing that.²⁹

By employing the teaching of dependent co-arising, Macy shows that interconnection is the key to a new (and old) way of living in a global world. Identity is not about the individual self so promulgated in the American success story. Identity is integrally linked to action (karma), as she sets forth in *The World as Lover, the World as Self*,

In the early Buddhist view, then, a person's identity resides not in an enduring self but in his actions (karma) - that is in the choices that shape these actions. Because the dispositions formed by previous choices can be modified in turn by present behavior, this identity as choice-maker is fluid, its experience alterable. While it is affected by the past, it can also break free of the past. ...General systems theory has helped me understand this. In systems thinking also, action appears as choice, and choice as identity³⁰

Action as choice and choice as identity are useful lenses through which to understand why there needs to be seismic shift in the way business is done in the United States if sustainable change is to be permanent and life-giving. To live the belief that we are all connected is a challenge to our social order, but I believe the only way to freedom for all beings. The Third Turning of the Wheel calls us to see and live a life of interconnection:

Now we see that everything we do impinges on all beings. The way you are with your child is a political act, and the products you buy and your efforts to recycle are part of it too. So is meditation--just trying to stay aware is a task of tremendous importance. We are trying to be present to ourselves and each other in a way that can save our planet. Saving life on this planet includes developing a

²⁹Macy, Joanna. "The Third Turning of the Wheel," (A Tribute to Thomas Berry). <http://www.joannamacy.net/html/engaged.html> (accessed February 5, 2009).

³⁰Macy, *Lover*, 92.

strong, caring connection with future generations; for, in the Dharma of co-arising, we are here to sustain one another over great distances of space and time.
³¹

“The moon belongs to everyone, the best things in life are free,” goes the tune by the same name from the late 1940’s. The best “things” in life are not commodities that are bought or sold. What brings peace and joy are relationships that are cultivated through the practice of communing with other beings in their joy and in their suffering. Beloved Buddhist teacher scholar, activist, poet, meditator, and mediator Thich Nhat Hanh embodies this generosity while articulating the angst from which so many Western people suffer – lives that are so full with things, and yet so very empty and disconnected from that which gives life and is continually replenishing itself: nature.

In his essay, “The Sun My Heart,” Thich Nhat Hanh gives concrete examples of how to bridge the divide of dharma and deed, showing how dharma and deed are indeed interconnected when one sees everything as interconnected. To realize this is to live in harmony with all beings and to seek out those places and things in the world that best demonstrate that interconnectedness, whether it be a favorite tree, mountains, rivers, or the sun itself.³² The realization of the harmony of all beings comes through mindfulness of the interconnectedness of creation. As Thich Nhat Hanh gently warns,

We have to remember that our body is not limited to what lies within the boundary of our skin. Our body is much more immense....If the sun were to stop shining, the flow of our life would stop. The sun is our second heart; our heart

³¹ Macy, Joanna. “Dependent Co-Arising.”

³²“The Mountains and Water Sutra” by Dogen in *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, we read. “Mountains and water right now are the actualization of the ancient Buddha way. Each, abiding in its phenomenal expression, realizes completeness,” 65.

outside of our body... We cannot begin to describe all the effects of the sun, that great heart outside of our body.³³

Thich Nhat Han identifies and then seeks to practice the interconnectedness of all life forms. As he so beautifully and simply states,

It also depends on us. Our way of walking on the Earth has a great influence on animals and plants. We have killed so many animals and plants and destroyed their environments. Whether we can wake up or not depends on whether we can walk mindfully on our Mother Earth. The future of all life, including our own, depends on our mindful steps.³⁴

Taking mindful steps is the only way out of the environmental crisis we face. Buddhists and ecofeminists give all spiritual seekers ancient and modern ways to find new paths to freedom for all creation. It is not too late to take such mindful steps. Indeed, a sustainable future depends on our taking such mindful steps.

³³ Hanh, Thich Nhat. "The Sun My Heart," 84 in *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, edited by Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, 129.

³⁴ Hanh, "The Sun My Heart," 86.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Importance of Place

The key word in the title to this thesis may appear to be “interreligious” or “eco-justice,” but that would be incorrect. The key word is “community.” Community is at the heart of all our religious and environmental work - people thinking, living, breathing and working together to build a cleaner, safer, kinder, gentler and slower world. In the Christian tradition, the roots of such community are found in the command that Jesus, as a Jew, gave his followers, “to love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). In the Buddhist tradition, community, “sangha,” is one of the three jewels. According to Thich Nhat Hanh, sangha is the most important of these three precious jewels because “it contains the Buddha and the Dharma.”¹ Stressing the primacy of community, Thich Nhat Hanh professes that,

A Good teacher is important, but sisters and brothers in the practice are the main ingredient for success. You cannot achieve enlightenment by locking yourself in your room. Transformation is possible only when you are in touch. When you touch the ground, you can feel the stability of the earth and feel confident. When you observe the steadiness of the sunshine, the air, and the trees, you know that you can count on the sun to rise each day and the air and the trees to be there. When you build a house, build it on solid ground. You need to choose friends in the practice who are stable, on whom you can rely. Taking refuge in the sangha means putting your trust in a community of solid members who practice mindfulness together.²

This final chapter is about how my immediate faith community practices mindfulness together, with hearts, minds, and hands open to make connections to the community in which we find ourselves, as well as to the larger world. Our mindful practices are showing us we are all interconnected in our spiritual practices, most particularly for this thesis, our ecological ones. This chapter explores how we as a

¹Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Fertile Soil of Sangha,” *Tricycle* 17, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 13.

²Ibid., 13-14.

local Episcopal parish in the town of Bennington have undertaken ecological practices, “one step at a time.” The reciprocity that exists between our words and deeds keeps us honest. The practice of our implementing each mindful step has also shaped our beliefs. Practice has caused us to think differently about the effect of our actions on the world, underscoring a critical teaching in Buddhism of the interconnectedness of all life forms. The word that strikes me as an analogy for interconnection in the church is *perichoresis*, a term from the Eastern Church for ‘interpenetration’ of the members of the Trinity. This mutual intimate interpenetration and indwelling of the God the Father and God the Son as described in John's Gospel (cf. John 17:23) is also a way to think of the community of the world, a fellowship of interdependence, of shared love and celebration of all creation.

A good friend of mine describes how we are called to be rebels for heaven.³ That provocative phrase haunts me and comes readily to mind when reflecting on the radical thinking and range of activities in Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown's *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*. I summarize the theme of this book, a combination of dire predictions, new ways of thinking, sustainability models, and activities for group work. It asks the question “Why and how we must be interconnected?” In *Coming Back to Life*, Macy and Young underscore the need to reconnect to the world in a post industrial age; we need to reconnect in order to survive as the human race. We need to live together in community. Our survival will depend upon our putting best spiritual practices first in all our decisions. But here's the hitch and

³Conversation with Howard Cohen on June 1, 2006.

challenge, according to Macy and Young. In order to live in this post industrial age, we have to reconnect with new, post industrial life-sustaining ways of thinking and living, the “Great Turning.” “The Great Turning arises in response to what we know and feel is happening to our world. It entails both the perception of danger and the means to act.”⁴

According to Macy and Young, humanity’s failure to recognize, affirm, proclaim and practice what gives life and health has caused this great demise in Western society. Is there any hope for us and our faith communities? Yes, but it will involve a radical shift in our mindset – a new dance in the world. Our attitudes, our practices and our lifestyles will have to change. It’s not too late, but the effects of not staying connected to best spiritual practices are frightening for the survival of the human race. The greatest danger, according to Macy and Young is apatheia, “the deadening of the mind and heart and our repression of pain.”⁵ How I have seen people in 12-step programs, trying valiantly not to succumb to apatheia by numbing themselves again with food, alcoholic drinks, pills, and injections. How very courageous it is – and how very much community is needed to assist those suffering from addictions. Consumerism is also a form of suffering and, for some, an addiction, or one lurking at the door. The remedy to consumerism in American culture is community, community grounded in sustainable principles and spiritual practices.

⁴Joanna S. Macy and Brown, Molly, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect our Life, our World*. (Stony Creek, CT: New Society Publishers, 1998), 25.

⁵Ibid., 25.

No question about it. We must choose life – and gratitude. Dire predictions notwithstanding, we can be, like my friend, “rebels for heaven.” We can still act to insure a livable world. To choose life in 2009 in our faith communities means to build a life-sustaining society both locally and globally. I am reminded of the World Commission on Environment and Development’s definition of a sustainable society as “one that satisfies its needs without jeopardizing the prospects of future generations.”⁶ This commitment to a viable future is at the heart of Earth Day.

The First Earth Day

Every April 22 Americans celebrate "Earth Day," though of course, every day is "Earth Day." April 22, 2009 will mark the 39th Anniversary of Earth Day started in 1970 by the late Senator Gaylord Nelson. I was in seventh grade with Mr. Brown in the new Manheim Township Middle School in Lancaster, PA when we commemorated that first Earth Day. Looking back to that day in Middle School, my environmental awareness came from two sources: television and my seventh grade science teacher – not from my religious community.

One of the first commercials I recall from my television viewing youth was an Ad Council commercial featuring Native American actor Iron Eyes Cody in the “Keep America Beautiful” campaign. That ad first aired on Earth Day 1971. The image of a strong and brave Indian on horseback amidst a litter-strewn landscape left a big impression on me, complete with the single tear streaming down his face.⁷ It took me

⁶"Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development," [cited 2008]. Available from <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/42/ares42-187.htm>.

⁷Ad featured on National Council Churches of Christ Eco-Justice Programs, www.nccecojustice.org (accessed April 17, 2008).

decades, however, to connect the words that I heard every week in church to caring for the environment, to the lectures by my science teacher, Mr. Brown.

Have the times changed? We hear a lot in religious circles about caring for the earth, including from the leader of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Katherine Jefferts Schori, a committed environmentalist and a marine biologist. In a letter sent to the U.S. Senate on March 31, she wrote, “We cannot love our neighbors unless we care for the creation that supports all our earthly lives.”⁸ We also have a lot of resources available to us, and we need them all! The environmental crisis that in 1970 seemed like no more than land pollution has become the greatest moral crisis facing every living being. It is a moral crisis as well as an environmental crisis that can either immobilize us (for when we are fearful and overwhelmed we most often become immobilized) or call us to engage our deepest resources, knowledge and wisdom.

I will describe some of the practical steps to address the ecological crisis that we have begun to implement in my parish in Vermont and in my town of Bennington. This “hands on” approach to religious environmentalism is at the heart of the community in which I work. I will outline eight mindful steps that we have taken at my parish, all implemented with the intention to increase our engagement in the interfaith community, in the town of Bennington, in the State of Vermont, and the New England region. Later I will include a critical examination of how race, gender, class and multiculturalism are reflected in new, transformative models for the individual and

⁸Letter by Katharine Jefferts Schori to US Senate on March 31, 2008, www.episcopalchurch.org (accessed April 20, 2008).

community, that are life flourishing and thereby do not contribute to further environmental degradation and economic oppression. First I summarize the thinking behind this critical work we have begun in Bennington.

Study and Action (Dharma and Deed)

The synergy between the study of ecology and its embodiment in action have become essential to my spiritual practice and to the religious community in which I serve. I also believe that the complementarity of “dharma and deed”⁹ (teaching and action) in Buddhists like Thich Nhat Hanh is part of the appeal of his writing. Including Engaged Buddhism in a spiritual community’s spiritual practice means practicing mindfulness and love in all our work, particularly in the development of an eco-conscience for the local community.

At the “Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism” conference organized by the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale Divinity School in February 2008, Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-founder of the Forum on Religion and Ecology and now its co-coordinator at Yale University, identified the two critical parts to religious environmentalism: the academic study of religion and ecology, as seen in the texts published through the Forum, and activism of both a religious and secular nature, as evidenced in the film, “Renewal,” shown at the conference and released late February 2008 in Boston.¹⁰

⁹This is taken from the subtitle of *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1997.

¹⁰Mary Evelyn Tucker, “Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism,” New Haven, CT, February 28, 2008.

I want to note the presence and participation of young people in this environmental activism. Above all others, young adults are the seekers of our time, people who have "been losing faith in a metaphysic that can make them feel at home in the universe and that they increasingly negotiate among competing glimpses of the sacred, seeking partial knowledge and practical wisdom"¹¹ These Yale students reminded me that young people are not drawn to most mainline denominations solely or primarily because of denominational teachings, i.e., doctrine. It is the fluid balance of action and teaching that is most attractive to searching young people in the twenty- first century and searching elders as well.

The liturgy that day at Yale reflected a mix of traditional and contemporary music from various religious traditions. This "boutique"¹² approach to the liturgy at the conference underscores a deeper truth about both the spiritual landscape of America in the twenty-first century as well as the appeal of religious environmentalism. Young people are drawn to what they see as true and relevant. The reality of the environmental crisis and the dire consequences of global warming in particular are spurring people of all ages to seek places and resources that actively address the suffering of the planet and all its inhabitants. Young adult seekers are drawn to institutions that are actively engaged in bringing healing to all that lives.

Two conversations at "Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism" were helpful in further identifying the appeal of Buddhists like Thich Nhat Hanh for

¹¹Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven : Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

¹²*Ibid.*, 15.

America's spiritual seekers. When I told Mark Wallace of Swarthmore College about reading Thich Nhat Hanh, he responded with great enthusiasm, "Buddhism has given Christianity a lightning bolt charge."¹³ Stephanie Kaza of the University of Vermont identified 3 areas in which Buddhists are responding to eco-justice in their spiritual practice: life style changes, structural change and ethical change.¹⁴ I believe that these three areas are useful to a community's spiritual practice. According to Kaza, life style change means unlearning consumerism and adopting "the green practice path." Structural change means attention to political and economic systems at every level, including holding institutions accountable.¹⁵ For me, such institutions include the church. Ethical change is "what will carry us."¹⁶

I have also been influenced by Buddhists Rita Gross, Joanna Macy and Thich Nhat Hanh in examining the development of best environmental practices from a Buddhist perspective, and a strategy of three-fold logic that Gross learned from the oral Tibetan tradition. In her book, *Soaring and Settling: Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues*, Gross espouses a system called "view, practice and result."

¹⁷ "This particular system focuses first on the theoretical analysis appropriate to a specific issue - the view. Then, with the view well in hand, we turn to the question of what practices or spiritual disciplines will enable one to realize or internalize the view, so that

¹³Conversation with Mark Wallace, New Haven, CT, February 28, 2008.

¹⁴Stephanie Kaza, "Panel: Reflections on the Past 20 Years of Religious Environmentalism: Where Are We Now?", presented at the "Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism" Conference, New Haven, CT, February, 28, 2008.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling : Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 78.

it is no longer merely an intellectual theory. Finally, understanding the view and having practiced the appropriate contemplative and meditative exercises, what actions will one take when the view is fully internalized?”¹⁸

Following Gross' terminology, this chapter focuses on the third part, the actions. While Gross has been disappointed with the small body of literature on Buddhist environmental ethics, “because most authors have focused on view or theory and have not sufficiently discussed practices promoting environmentally sound lifestyles,”¹⁹ I have found the Buddhist approach of mindfulness, along with meditation on interdependence and meditation on suffering, to add critical dimensions to my work in a primarily Christian community seeking to reach out to the larger interfaith community we serve. By engaging in mindful steps, not only is our religious practice deepened, so also is our faith community strengthened. And, our actions affect and change our thinking about our world and our place in it. By engaging in the following steps we at St. Peter's and in the town of Bennington have seen individual and community thinking changed and deepened to embrace wider areas of concern.

Bennington, Vermont

The cloud of hopelessness that can hang over Bennington, particularly in the economic downturn of the end of 2008, is experienced not only in the demands being placed on local clergy and congregations, but also on the resources of social service agencies, schools, government institutions and community organizations seeking to create community midst economic despair and environmental negligence. The Food and

¹⁸Ibid., 78.

¹⁹Ibid., 79.

Fuel Fund (FFF), now Greater Bennington Interfaith Community Services Inc. (GBICS) has worked with other community partners (Efficiency Vermont, the Bennington Energy Committee, and the New England Grassroots Environment Fund) to effectively address the specific environmental justice issue of finding ways to reduce electric bills among Bennington's poorest households. In 2006, the Food and Fuel Fund worked with the Bennington Energy Committee to put into service 30,000 compact fluorescent light bulbs in Bennington. The Fund distributed free compact fluorescent light bulbs along with energy savings advice to 100 families receiving Food and Fuel Fund assistance. In the past year, the FFF has also forged closer working relationships with the Bennington office of the Agency of Human Services, the Bennington-Rutland Opportunity Council (community action organization), and the Bennington Coalition for the Homeless, all the while advocating for increased attention to energy utilization.

GBICS has two distinct constituencies. The first is the members of the sixteen faith communities that comprise the Bennington Interfaith Council. The racial composition of the faith communities parallels that of Bennington, which is 99% Caucasian. The faith communities attract members from all economic backgrounds. There is fairly equal distribution with respect to gender. A number of local faith communities have reputations for being open and welcoming to people of differing sexual orientations; several have specific programs that require educational efforts within the faith community, followed by certification by a central institution. All faith communities are comprised of people with a variety of disabilities, including physical, mental and developmental. A number of faith communities are wrestling with the challenging demographic of serving an older

population: fewer young adults are involved, although they tend to become re-involved once they start families of their own.

The other constituency is people who have historically received help from the Food and Fuel Fund. This group is overwhelmingly economically poor: 90% of persons served in 2007 were estimated to have incomes under \$10,000 per year. Most people in this group are single women under 40 years of age with multiple children at home. The other significant sub-groups are male single parents, persons with disabilities and senior citizens. The racial mix reflects local demographics. The FFF does not collect data on sexual orientation. The majority of the constituents reside in four towns located in the rural southwestern corner of the state, including Bennington (the county seat of Bennington County), which includes the Village of North Bennington), Pownal, Shaftsbury and Woodford.

One approach some of us in the Interfaith Council are advocating is to use asset based community development (ABCD)²⁰ methods to assist both these constituencies we serve to identify and develop assets upon which to build their futures. It will only be when these assets are fully recognized and mobilized, that these individuals will become full contributors to the community-building process. Needless to say, this is very hard, albeit rewarding work. People are being asked to make significant changes in their lifestyles, and often they don't have the financial means to make those changes happen, even when they are convinced that to change all the light bulbs in the house to CFL's or to purchase an energy star appliance is the best environmental practice. Living at the

²⁰ABCD is an approach to community- based development that focuses on individual skills and community resources, as opposed to focusing on problems and needs.

economic fringe of society offers few choices. Decisions are based on what is available at the moment, not what is best to purchase or do in the long-run. Adults with the least amount of economic power are the ones most effected by the choices of others, thereby having little choice about their own life practices.

Making a paradigm shift will be a new way of thinking for our constituents and one which will lead to change in the way they perceive themselves and the way they lead their lives. We see this as particularly important at a time in our nation's history when funding for services and programs is being cut on a regular basis. While it would have been helpful to make this shift in a time of abundance, we are doing so in a time of scarcity because we anticipate that our constituency will only suffer even more over the coming months and years.

As a network of faith-based communities, we already have a "niche" in our community and an advantage to seize the opportunity to spearhead a paradigm shift that is collaborative with numerous community partners. GBICS is well-known and works closely with multiple community partners. As a result of our relationship with the communities of faith, we have a longstanding presence in our community. Our reputation is one of being accessible to people in crisis and as being a safe and caring presence and a place to turn in a time of need. The Interfaith Council has extensive capacity in building infrastructure, as many of our houses of worship are located in downtown Bennington. We have depth in the current commitments of the participating faith communities, who are the first half of our constituency. We have additional capacity in our access to a large, robust and willing volunteer pool. A number of the faith communities have experienced

leadership transitions in the past several years and have brought in new clergy who recognize that, in part, communicants are coming to the faith communities because of what they are doing in the community and not because of doctrine. Our overall presence in the community provides us with the opportunity for making bridges deeper into the community and into the lives of the second half of our constituency.

To date, it is environmental and economic justice initiatives, chiefly around reducing energy utilization, that have been the basis for interfaith collaboration. This collaboration is an antidote to the observation made by Robert Wuthnow when he states,

I believe the United States is moving into an era of what might be termed a 'thin consensus,' in which relatively few values are held in common."²¹

Wuthnow continues "...the United States is entering a period in which it is becoming harder and harder to express personal convictions and to trust others who express theirs. Because people have fluid identities as selves and as spiritual beings, they readily change their minds, but many also wonder how much they can trust themselves and their leaders if their minds are constantly in flux."²²

The following eight steps serve as benchmarks for the GBICS as a whole as well as for the individual faith communities served by the GBICS. If success can be measured in terms of positive response to actions, commitment to them and the ability to trust others who have made these decisions, then we at St. Peter's and GBICS have been successful in these initial steps in religious environmentalism. All our actions have included specific invitation to our colleagues in the Interfaith Council and all are implemented with the desire to attract seekers as well as forge bonds with members of other local congregations served by the GBICS.

²¹Wuthnow, *After Heaven : Spirituality in America since the 1950s*, 16.

²²*Ibid.*, 16.

Eight Mindful Steps

In this final section I will outline eight mindful steps designed to build sustainable community at St. Peter's, in the interfaith community, in Bennington, in Vermont, and in the world, one spiritual practice at a time. These steps include an energy audit; an initial course on religious environmentalism; a second course based on local foods and the creation of a “locavore”²³; the development of a community garden; the proposal of an interfaith energy service alliance; an annual convention on the theme of sustainability, a partnership with the local school district and liturgies that create community and re-connect our lives to our world.

In November 2005 an energy audit of St. Peter's Church was conducted by VT Interfaith Power and Light. Since that initial review, we have made sure that the recommended steps are being followed, including the posting of signs at entrances to the building about conserving heat. Following the three fold pattern, REDUCE, REUSE and then RECYCLE, this ecology motto has become a methodology for decision-making about recycling cell phones and computers; buying renewable energy; using water; turning off lights; planting trees; holding a rummage sale, as well as choosing curricula for children and adults. We have made significant changes to our lifestyles as we continue to explore what it means to be stewards of God’s creation. The wardens, the rector, and the sexton have been discussing transitioning to non-toxic cleaning supplies. Photocopies must be double-sided. Food and beverages are almost always served on

²³A locavore is local community of people who covenant to eat food from their local foodshed or a determined radius from their home, commonly either 100 or 250 miles, depending on location.

"real" dishes instead of disposable ones. Styrofoam has been banned from the campus.

Yet, we would not be satisfied with these initial, but critical baby steps.

In the fall of 2006 we held a course entitled, "How Then Shall We Live? Decreasing One's Carbon Footprint," beginning with the sobering exercise of calculating one's ecological footprint.²⁴ In the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, some eco-teams have been formed using the "Low Carbon Diet"²⁵ as a basis for their study and action together. How to begin an environmental program? Most environmentalists recommend starting with the "low hanging fruit," those things in our lives that are the most graspable and easiest to change. We start with something that is manageable, a goal that is attainable.

The "eco-team" is one the latest expressions of the congregation's desire to celebrate and preserve God's gift of creation. Since its inception in November 2007, the St. Peter's Eco-Team has been studying food through the lenses of sustainability and social justice. At an initial series that met for six weeks in the fall 2007, parishioners and community members heard from guest speakers ranging from community-supported agriculture farmers to beekeepers. At all times, the focus was on making "green" eating feasible for those living in poverty or otherwise food insecure.

The next part of this series, reconvened in April 2008, began implementing the projects that were planned in the fall series -- from communal gardens to alternative energy. The final meeting, included a showing of the film, *Renewal*, which looks at eight

²⁴Cf. www.center1.com/crle.html

²⁵David Gershon, *Low Carbon Diet: A 30 Day Program to Lose 5000 Pounds* (Woodstock, NY: Empowerment Institute, 2006).

faith communities and how they adopted ways to address global climate change. This spring series also found participants taking turns preparing dinner for the group with fresh, local ingredients. Food enthusiasts added a challenge one week to feed seven on \$5.00 or less. The class came in just thirty-six cents over-budget, with only nutritious, organic (and tasty) ingredients. Now the class has moved outside - just in time for Spring planting!

As a demonstration of our commitment to “Think Globally, Act (and eat) Locally,” the Vestry of St. Peter's approved the creation of a communal vegetable garden in April 2008 and made available to the parish and Pleasant Street/School Street neighbors who wished to work in it. St. Peter's provided space, training, and a St. Peter's-based team to manage the garden using organic gardening and composting methods. This Eco-Team produced food to share among the gardeners, with surplus to be shared within the parish and with local agencies. They promoted the benefits of sustainable community gardening by alliance with other Bennington-based community garden efforts that are beginning this year. An additional garden bed is planned for the Spring of 2009.

I had the occasion to ask David Haberman, scholar and professor of Hinduism and Ecology of Indiana University, at the “Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism” at Yale Divinity School that if there was one thing that every congregation take on as religious practice, what would it be. “The best environmental practice for every congregation to embrace is quite simply, to plant a garden.”²⁶ All religions have stories set in nature, tales of planting and growing the harvest. The Hebrew

²⁶Conversation with David Haberman, New Haven, CT, February 28, 2008.

and Christian Scriptures begin with stories set in a garden. Punishment for disobedience for the first man and woman in the Bible is banishment from a garden. In Genesis, the first man and woman, Adam and Eve are banished from the land, separated from growing the fruits of the earth.

In Buddhism the image of Indra's jeweled net is one to consider when planning a community garden. In this story the jeweled net is made all of jewels. Because the jewels are clear, they reflect each other's images, appearing in each other's reflections upon reflections, ad infinitum, all appearing at once in one jewel, and in each one it is so, until ultimately there is no going or coming!²⁷ The jeweled net also underscores a critical Buddhist teaching of the interdependence of all beings.

The garden is the latest example of how to encourage the development of locavores through interfaith collaboration, community planning and implementation while strengthening and deepening ties to Bennington and to one another as members of the interfaith community. A garden is a poignant and natural example of interconnection of life forms, and a powerful symbol of community collaboration. By eating locally, Benningtonian locavores seek to create a greater connection between themselves and their food sources, resist industrialized and processed foods, and support their local economy. These locavores give themselves exceptions to their local diet, as outlined in great detail in Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*. Commonly excluded items include coffee, chocolate, salt, and/or spices, although

²⁷Tu-Shun, "The Jewel Net of Indra" in Kaza and Kraft, *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, 58-59.

locavores in Bennington are coffee drinkers and have tended to purchase only fair trade and organically grown coffee.²⁸ The “Bishop’s Blend”²⁹ of fair trade, organic coffee, that is promoted through the Episcopal Church is found at many Episcopal church coffee hours. When the Vestry of St. Peter’s hosted the Bishop of Vermont for his annual visitation in November 2008, a locally grown and produced meal graced the table. Only the fair trade organic coffee travelled more the 100 miles from its inception to its place on the dinner table.

We continue to discover how a common meal instantly creates bonds of friendship and deep understanding. For many in our interfaith circles, a common meal followed by a meditation group or reflection series is their faith community, thus we are ever expanding the way we “worship” here at St. Peter’s. Our locavore gatherings as well as the meals created by the young cooks in Quantum Leap’s “Blooming Chefs” program are giving us new friends and partnerships for our mindful environmental steps.

Quantum Leap is an educational laboratory that reconnects at-risk youth to their education. This laboratory of people and ideas has created several programs which are currently in session. The Quantum Leap Classroom serves at-risk students through smaller, more individualized classes, using a combination of learning styles and

²⁸Fair trade coffee is coffee grown and produced following standards that empower local farmers and consumers employing sustainable farming methods that advocate the payment of a fair price for goods to create economic self-sufficiency. Fair trade practices also encourage producers and workers to become stakeholders in their own organizations. Goods, such as coffee are most often produced in Third World countries.

²⁹Episcopal Relief and Development offers Bishops Blend, a premium line of Certified Fair Trade, organic, and shade-grown coffees from Central America and Indonesia. The purchase of Bishops Blend helps ERD meet needs worldwide. Episcopal Relief and Development is the international relief and development agency of the Episcopal Church of the United States.

techniques.”³⁰ Within this environment, students take control of and have a powerful voice in their own education. Continuous support and guidance is provided throughout the semester. At the conclusion of each semester, the Quantum Leap Classroom Exhibit gives students the opportunity to demonstrate what they are capable of and to showcase their achievements in a formal setting.

Since the inception of Quantum Leap, Susan Sgorbati and Daniel Michaelson, Co-Directors of Quantum Leap, have trained over 200 teachers, mentors, social workers, lawyers, medical professionals and students in conflict resolution skills. All of the staff of Quantum Leap are expected to receive mediation training. The Bennington College Master of Arts in Teaching and Certification program offers Quantum Leap assistant positions each year to deserving students. There are scholarships to support future teachers who want to learn more about working with youth at-risk. Carol Adinolfi is the teacher assigned to the Blooming Chefs program at St. Peter's. Her deep commitment to organic cooking, working with children at risk and community collaboration with the faith community have proved a winning combination for her young students. I have working directly with the teachers in this program, and have introduced some of the exercises from *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*, specifically the “Circle of Blessings”³¹ to the teachers and their young chefs. The next steps in this collaboration are a proposed community garden project with the students as well as a greenhouse – housed in the Parish Hall of St. Peter's.

³⁰Carol Amelia Adinolfi, “Blooming Chefs: A Program for Youth in the Bennington Community (A Special Project of Quantum Leap/Bennington College),” November 2007.

³¹Joanna S. Macy and Brown, Molly, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Life, Our World*, 180.

In the Blooming Chefs program students learn about local ecosystems and begin to make the connection between these concepts on a small scale and the greater good of the world. Children have a natural curiosity about nutrition, often springing from health problems they see in themselves and in the important adults in their lives. Greater awareness about how food affects the body leads to positive changes in eating habits, thus leading to improved attentiveness and academic performance. In this program students have an experience of a hands-on approach to healthy, delicious and nutritious food, access to a deeper understanding and appreciation of how nature sustains life and are actively involved in the connections between garden and kitchen activities and classroom work. Finally, through the preparation of foods from various cultures they are learning about many parts of the world and how the local community and food can go hand in hand. Blooming Chefs is a stunning example of the way dharma and deed, teaching and action, are working together to address the challenges faced by at-risk children in Bennington.

The Blooming Chefs program showcases how one faith community is working to change the future of the students, one organic and nutritious meal at a time. This showcasing recently occurred when students in the program were both the chefs and servers at a reception held by the Bennington Chamber of Commerce and Bennington Business Corporation. Accolades for both the food and the program resounded throughout the art gallery.

With St. Peter's recent creation of a community garden we hope that the young chefs on our campus will expand their program to the planning, planting, cultivation and

harvesting of a community garden. The garden at St. Peter's would be connected to classroom and after-school projects. The growing of food here at St. Peter's would provide students with a sense of purpose and collaboration, as well as a stronger identification with the greater community, increasing knowledge of biology, nutrition, history, geography and agriculture, or ecoliteracy.

Ecoliteracy is one of the chief goals of the Blooming Chefs program. By their participation in a community garden, young students will be able to experience the complete “seed to table” trajectory.³² Students will take active part in the entire process from the planning and planting of the garden through classes where they create healthful, delicious meals out of the bounty. They will reflect upon their experiences through writing, photography and visual art. This engagement will bring alive the areas encompassed by ecoliteracy. Finally, through direct, physical experience, students will learn the basic principles of organic gardening and its crucial and positive implications. Undoubtedly, such involvement in a community garden will improve students’ knowledge about local food and culture, and increase students’ investment in Bennington, laying the groundwork for active, responsible citizenship. It is hard to imagine a more perfect example of interdependence and *perichoresis* than a community garden at a church whose participants include children emotionally and economically at risk.

While we at St. Peter's have initiated many recent environmental programs and endeavors, we are committed to getting them out past the “bounds” of St. Peter's. The

³²Carol Amelia Adinolfi, “Blooming Chefs: A Program for Youth in the Bennington Community”(A Special Project of Quantum Leap/Bennington College), November 2007.

real staying power of these initiatives is rooted in our collaboration and lack of ownership. Ultimately, all that we do is for the betterment of the community in which we find ourselves and are called to serve. We are striving to live out our first parish goal, “To visibly reach out to the wider (including world) community.”

On January 26, 2008, St. Peter's eco-team hosted two master composters: Amy Risen, a doctoral researcher in environmental toxicology from Cornell University, and Kat McCarthy, from Tompkins County Solid Waste and Recycling. The standing-room only crowd learned that food scraps in the landfill produce methane, which is a greenhouse gas. They discussed indoor (vermiculture)³³ and outdoor composting techniques. Families went home with starter wormbins, complete with red wigglers. Several participants committed to starting to compost at their workplaces, in addition to their efforts at home. St. Peter's set an example by beginning an outdoor compost bin in a corner of the church grounds this spring. The compost fertilized the community garden. In addition to showcasing the harvest at parish meals, the eco-team is networking with local food banks to grow fresh, organic vegetables with and for food insecure families.

Meanwhile, the Vestry continues to explore ways and allocate funds to become as energy-efficient as possible. A number of parishioners have switched from burning oil to burning wood pellets, as many schools in Vermont have successfully done. Needless to say, such endeavors have a hefty upfront cost and therefore, seem prohibitively expensive, though the savings from reducing our dependence on oil is noteworthy.

³³Vermiculture is the raising and casting of earth worms, usually red wigglers for the purpose of indoor composting.

To address cost and financing, and not just for ourselves, but throughout Bennington and New England, religious leaders throughout New England and New York held an initial meeting in May 2008 at St. Peter's to explore ways to buy renewable energy through an energy performance contracting proposal for congregations. We are actively exploring how to fund renewable energy with limited financial resources. Faith communities also generally understand the energy security and local economic benefits of energy efficiency and renewable energy. Recently PBS of Boston, MA, featured the Cambridge Energy Alliance's work in creating an energy service company in the city of Cambridge, MA. Religious communities in Cambridge, through the Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light, are exploring this exciting concept. Thanks to interfaith collaboration, we are now exploring this financing model for other towns in New England, specifically Bennington.

With help from Vermont Interfaith Power & Light (VT IPL) denominational environmental organizations, and Efficiency Vermont, over 20% of Vermont's places of worship are in the process of trying to save energy and/or increase the use of renewable energy. However, with some notable exceptions, our places of worship have been slow to make major improvements in energy efficiency and to use renewable energy. Congregations are often behind the commercial sector and parts of the residential sector in addressing the problem.

Most places of worship were built before modern energy efficient building construction practices were common, and their architecture, and in some cases historical features, make them hard to retrofit. In addition to the characteristics of the buildings,

Vermont Interfaith Power & Light has identified three factors that are often obstacles to faith communities making energy improvements. According to Colin High, professor of engineering and board member of Vermont Interfaith Power & Light, these factors are a lack of technical knowledge and access to trustworthy engineering, building, and financial expertise to evaluate options and develop integrated solutions; slow and sometimes cumbersome congregational decision-making structures; and access to capital for retrofits.³⁴ (The majority of opportunities are retrofits, not new construction) These three obstacles are not unique to faith communities. In other sectors, similar problems have been addressed by energy performance contracting.³⁵

VT IPL is in the process of assessing the potential for organizing or facilitating an energy performance contracting service. From the database of over 100 churches where VT IPL has conducted audits or provided other energy outreach services, they have identified two churches, (one large and one medium sized) with relatively high electricity and oil fuel consumption that are now being evaluated for energy efficiency improvements and possibly fuel switching to wood pellets. The evaluation includes a financial model to assess the potential for commercial financing. In this work, VT IPL is being assisted by Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC), which is the parent company of Efficiency Vermont. The board members of VT IPL expect that this work will enable them to determine approximately how many places of worship in Vermont might be candidates for commercially financed energy performance contracting. They are

³⁴Colin High, "DRAFT: Energy Performance Contracting for Congregation A Concept Statement," paper presented at a regional meeting of Interfaith Power & light leaders, Bennington, VT, May 8, 2008.

³⁵Ibid.

also trying to gather case studies of energy improvements in other New England and New York places of worship to help define viable financial models. My congregation is hoping to be considered as a candidate for such a contract.

At this point VT IPL board members do not have a definite business model.

However, one model that seems practical to examine is a hybrid non-profit and for-profit alliance. The first step would be to organize a non-profit umbrella organization which we are calling an Interfaith Energy Services Alliance, IESA). The IESA would offer the following services:

- Undertake outreach to faith communities to provide information and recruitment into a program (probably organized through the IPL).
- Facilitate program level coordination with state government, utilities, Efficiency Vermont, etc.
- Recruit and screen experienced energy performance contracting companies. (EPCCs) to provide engineering and building services through the program.
- Recruit and screen financial institutions to provide commercial financing of viable projects.
- Identify sources of grants, subsidized loan programs, etc. to assist congregations. This might include government, foundation, or denominational assistance.
- Advise congregations in the selection of EPCCs and financial institutions.
- Establish a set of codes of practice for participating congregations, EPCCs and financial institutions.
- Provide a set of model contracts for participants.
- Recommend/ establish program protocols for measurement and verification of energy savings (consistent with national codes such as ASHRAE³⁶
- Recommend/ establish protocols for measurement and verification of GHG reductions (consistent with national and international protocols e.g. Green-e, ERT,³⁷ National Climate Registry).
- Provide periodic reporting and evaluation of program performance.
- If practical and desired, provide for aggregation of RECs, EECs, and GHG reduction credits for participating congregations. Provide for registration of GHG reductions and transfers.³⁸

³⁶American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers. -

³⁷Environmental Resources Trust.

³⁸Colin High, "DRAFT: Energy Performance Contracting for Congregation A Concept Statement," paper presented at a regional meeting of Interfaith Power & light leaders, Bennington, VT, May 8, 2008.

The participating EPCCs would provide engineering, building and other technical services, design of energy solutions, financial planning and submissions to financial institutions, contracting, and management of subcontractors, measurement and verification of energy and financial savings as well as follow-up and periodic reporting. It is likely that the IESA will need grant support to begin. Ongoing income would come from fees from participating EPCCs and financial institutions. The IESA would in turn provide fees to the IPL for outreach, education, and recruitment.³⁹

The advantage of this model for faith communities is that the IESA does not need substantial capital and does not incur financial risk. It does not put the non-profit IESA in competition with business, and it capitalizes on the expertise that already exists in the performance contracting industry and financial institutions. Finally, it builds environmental bridges between the best practices of the local business community and the local congregation's desire to insure its building future, while lowering its carbon footprint.

These are some of the mindful steps we are taking in addressing the moral crisis of creation care from a parish, town and interfaith view. All our programs are free and open to the public. For a small parish, we spend a lot of time on communication and have weekly television, radio, email announcements and newspaper “spots.” Our identity, and therefore our visibility, includes our membership in the the Diocese of Vermont. Even though in many ways we identify geographically and meteorologically much more with the Berkshires, Western Massachusetts and the Capitol region of Albany, NY than

³⁹ Ibid.

with the State of Vermont, our identity as Episcopalians in the Diocese of Vermont is a point of particular pride as the diocese becomes a leader in environmental sustainability in the Episcopal Church of America.

At its diocesan convention in 2007 the Episcopal Bishop of Vermont, The Right Reverend Thomas Clark Ely announced the theme of Sustainability for our Diocesan Convention in Rutland November 7 and 8. (The Diocese of Vermont includes the entire state of Vermont, or 48 Episcopal congregations). We were honored to have as our keynote speaker Bill McKibben, acclaimed environmentalist, noted author and fellow Vermonter! As Bishop Ely stated in a letter to the people of Vermont,

This theme was chosen in order to build upon our commitment to a sustainable future for our planet and all people expressed in our support of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The connection between ending global poverty and environmental sustainability runs deep in the seventh of the eight Millennium Development Goals: Ensure environmental sustainability.⁴⁰

By underscoring the connection of the MDG's to best environmental practices in the State of Vermont, Bishop Ely reminded his flock that environmental responsibility includes thinking globally, while acting locally. His address in 2007 also underscored a critical theme of this thesis - that actions change belief. By offering workshops on best environmental practices in the State of Vermont, the design team engaged participants' thinking about the environment, and how local and personal decisions have a profound impact on the global community. To model these best practices the design team made Convention 2008 as green as possible. Their zeal in advocating reduction of paper usage,

⁴⁰ Thomas C. Ely, "Environmental Sustainability to be Focus of Next Diocesan Convention," *Mountain Echo*, Episcopal Diocese of Vermont, Vol. 19, No. 5, B, <http://www.dioceseofvermont.org/Elyletters/ElyLetters08/ElyMay08.html> (accessed May 9, 2008).

carpooling, purchasing carbon offsets for travel to Rutland and the ministry workshops, taking one's ecological footprint, providing energy audits for churches, showcasing local foods at all meals, including communion bread made with local ingredients, all met with enthusiasm by convention delegates. The ministry fairs and convention provided tangible changes congregants can implement in their personal life styles and at their churches. Remembering the critical voice young people have in the future of the planet, this year's ministry fairs also showcased children and youth in presentations about earth care and eating locally. The Bishop underscored his commitment to Convention's' theme, "Tending God's World – NOW!!" in his address at the 2008 Diocesan Convention when he stated, "Because of the environmental crisis of global climate change and the urgency with which Bill McKibben and others have said we must act, I am persuaded that this is the number one theological, moral, ecclesial, and political priority for our diocese at this time."⁴¹

If our actions are in service to one another and in thanksgiving for all that we have been given, then everything we do is worship. In our worship we are drawn to the source of all goodness and blessing, the creator of the universe. More specifically, it is in liturgy that we most profoundly acknowledge "The place where God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."⁴² For example, the February 2008 conference at Yale showcased the music of John L. Bell, in particular his arrangement of the Korean Traditional tune, "While Earth Remains" in our Convention

⁴¹Thomas C. Ely, "Diocesan Convention Address," Rutland, Vermont, November 2, 2008.

⁴²Frederick Buechner, <http://necessityproclivity-anddelight.wordpress.com/2006/07/31/buechner-on-vocation/> (accessed May 3, 2008).

Eucharist. This Christian hymn set to a Korean folk tune was mesmerizing to the congregants in the Marquand Chapel. The opening line of the first hymn of the Conference Eucharist, “Above the Moon, Earth Rises” included garden and emerald language, proclaiming the innate beauty of creation, “Above the moon earth rises a sunlit mossy stone, A garden that God prizes where life has richly grown, an emerald selected for us to guard with care, an isle in space protected by one thin reef of air.”⁴³

To this listener, the verses of this hymn recalled themes of the Garden of Eden and the Jeweled Net of Indra, emphasizing Jewish and Christian teaching of creation as a gift from God entrusted to human beings, as well as the Buddhist teaching of interdependence and dependent co-origination. The grieving of a moist, crying stone and the call to listen to the suffering of creation are not common themes in Christian hymns, but there they were all there in an opening hymn pointing to the critical role human activity plays in either bringing “the end or new beginning for all that live on earth.”⁴⁴

For many, music engages the human spirit to deep rhythms of the universe. For others, silence, like the rests in music, becomes as important as what is printed on the page. In the desire to incorporate interfaith materials, increase participation as well as challenge worshippers to think and act in new ways at St. Peter’s, we are also exploring some of the liturgies in *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*, by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown. Specifically, we are employing the “Circle of Blessings” for raising awareness of our environmental practice through our liturgies here at St. Peter’s, in our interfaith work and at the diocesan level. In

⁴³Thomas Troeger, “Above the Moon, Earth Rises,” Text Tune: “Merle’s Tune.”

⁴⁴Ibid.

the closing circle of liturgy, participants tell of a particular action or path they intend to pursue, and receive each other's blessings for it. This blessing is a "kind of reciprocal 'commissioning,' which lets worshippers to receive and carry with them the group's support for their intention."⁴⁵ This Circle of Blessings may also become a practice in our community garden, for example. This practice also highlights the interconnectedness of ministry and of the reciprocity between our environmental actions and our teachings about the environment.

When liturgy is celebrated with a keen awareness of its purpose, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all nature, the liturgy has validity and long lasting beauty. When care has been given to life sustaining principles and materials – i.e., the use of silence, water, intercessory prayer - then the liturgy can be transformative. I have seen this happen. Often it is a simple matter of being attentive to the balance of materials and words and the way we intentionally - mindfully - use space and pause to give thanks for creation at every opportunity. It is the common human need and acknowledgment that we are all connected that is at the root of all our worship, and of our eco-justice practices as well.

⁴⁵Joanna S Macy and Brown. Molly, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Life, Our World*, 180.

CONCLUSION

Together the religious communities in Bennington are looking at how the environmental crisis first and most severely affects those living at the economic fringes of our communities. We have our greatest voice in urging support of legislation that addresses climate change while providing assistance to those living in poverty when we speak from an interfaith block. If we lose a vision of what a better, more sustainable future can be for all of creation, we will be stuck in the grim realities of our present crisis. When we face the harsh reality of global warming and commit ourselves to drastic reform, we can have a vision of a cleaner world and local community for our children and work to make that vision a reality.

Toward the end of her career, Helen Keller was speaking at a Midwestern college when a student asked Keller, who was blind and deaf from early childhood, “Miss Keller, is there anything that could have been worse than losing your sight?” Helen Keller replied: “Yes, I could have lost my vision.”⁴⁶ May such vision be our inspiration to make our collective voices heard in our religious communities, in our courts and government, in our schools and in our workplaces, in our local businesses, in short, in all that we hold near and dear for the future of this planet. “The sense of how blessed we are by the life we share, in this amazing universe,”⁴⁷ is a reality and vision that we must never lose sight of. “Each of us has an important and irreplaceable role to play in the healing of our world. Each has distinctive gifts to bring...”⁴⁸ The future of all life, including our

⁴⁶Bill Moyers, “Discovering What Democracy Means,” [http://www. TomPaine.com](http://www.TomPaine.com) (accessed February 12, 2007).

⁴⁷Joanna S. Macy and Molly Brown, *Coming Back to Life: Practices*, 89.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 179.

own, depends on our gifts, our vision and our mindful steps.”⁴⁹ These mindful steps take us to that place where we are called and always meant to be in community building: “The place where God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹Thich Nhat Hanh, “The Sun My Heart,” in Kaza and Kraft, *Dharma Rain : Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, 86.

⁵⁰Frederick Buechner, <http://necessityproclivity-anddelight.wordpress.com/2006/07/31/buechner-on-vocation/> (accessed May 3, 2008).

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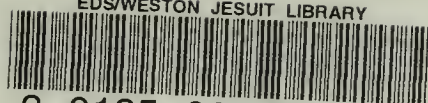
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